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THE BEQUEST OF
EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
CLASS OF 1882
OF NEW YORK

1918



I O N ;

A T R A G E D Y,

IN FIVE ACTS.

BY

THOMAS NOON TALFOURD.



THIRD EDITION.

LONDON:

EDWARD MOXON, DOVER STREET.

~~~~~  
1836.

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**FROM**  
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N O T I C E,  
—  
INSTEAD OF DEDICATION.

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IN offering this attempt at dramatic composition to the public at large, I should not intrude a single remark if I were not reminded of an irreparable loss by the necessity of omitting a Dedication to one whose name should have graced its opening page. The two Editions which have been privately circulated were inscribed to my venerable and indulgent friend, DR. VALPY, upon whose long life of kindness Death has since set the final seal. When I ventured to claim for it his protection, I well knew that I might rely upon that charity which lavished its bounties upon every effort of his pupils, for tenderness to its faults, and for generous praise of any merits which the eye of friendship might detect or create. There was also a propriety in seeking this association for a work which was prompted by love of those remains of antique beauty which he had taught me to know and to revere ; which assumed that form of poetry in which he had chiefly delighted ; and which, although



meditated in broken hours, and at long intervals, had always mingled with the recollections of those happy days, when he first awakened within me the sense of classical grace, and of those after-seasons, when the exquisite representations of Greek Tragedy, which he superintended, made its images vital. He is gone to his rest, full of years and honours; and I cannot receive from him that sanction which he cordially gave me when I presented this Drama to my friends, now that I submit it to the judgment of a wider and an impartial circle. Death, which harmonizes the pictures of human character, found little in *his* to spiritualize or to soften; but if it has not enhanced the feeling of his excellences in the minds of those who felt their influence, it has enabled them to express that feeling without the semblance of flattery. It has left them free, not only to expatiate on those well-directed labours which have facilitated the access of the young to the elements of sound learning; on the solemn and persuasive tone of his pulpit eloquence; on the steadiness of his attachment to principles adopted with caution, expressed with moderation, yet maintained without a sigh at the cost of the emoluments and honours to which they were obstacles; but also to revert to that remarkable kindness of disposition which was the secret but active law of his moral being. His nature was not ameliorated, nor even characterized, but wholly moulded of Christian love to a degree of entireness of which there are few examples. He had no sense of injury but as something to be forgiven. The liberal allowance which he extended to all human frailties grew more active when they affected his

own interests, and interfered with his own hopes; so that, however he might reprobate evil at a distance, as soon as it came within his sphere, he desired only to overcome it by good. Envy, Hatred, and Malice, were to him mere names—like the figures of a speech in a schoolboy's theme, or the giants in a fairy tale—phantoms which never touched him with a sense of reality. His guileless simplicity of heart was not preserved in learned seclusion, or by a constant watchfulness over the development of youthful powers, (for he found time to mingle frequently in the blameless gaieties and the stirring business of life,) but by the happy constitution of his own nature, which passion could rarely disturb, and evil had no power to stain. His system of education was animated by a portion of his own spirit: it was framed to enkindle and to quicken the best affections, and to render emulation itself subservient to the generous friendships which it promoted. His charity, in its comprehensiveness, resembled nothing less than the imagination of the greatest of our poets, embracing every thing human; shedding its light upon the just and the unjust; detecting "the soul of goodness in things evil," and stealing rigidity from virtue; bringing into gentle relief those truths which are of aspect the most benign, and those suggestions and hopes which are most full of consolation; and attaching itself, in all the various departments of life, to individuals whose childhood it had fostered; in whose merits its own images were multiplied; or whose errors and sorrows supplied the materials of its most quick and genial action. The hold

which the Reading-schoolboy had upon it could not be forfeited, not even "by slights, the worst of injuries;" and when broken in fortune, deserted by relatives, and frowned on by the world, he had only to seek the hospitable roof of his old master—"claim kindred there, and have his claims allow'd." By the spirit of cordiality which breathed there, all party-differences were melted away, or, if perceived at all, served only to render tolerance more vivid; and when he who had presided there for fifty years left the scene of his generous labours as a permanent abode, it was to diffuse the serenity of a good conscience and the warmth of unchilled affections through the homes of children who were made proud as well as happy by his presence. Such was he to the last, amidst the infirmities which accidents rather than age had accumulated around him;—the gentlest of monitors, and the most considerate of sufferers—until he was withdrawn from those whose minds he had nurtured; one of whom, who has most cause for gratitude, pays this humble tribute to his memory.

T. N. T.

London, 26th May, 1836.

**I O N;**  
**A T R A G E D Y.**

## PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

**ADRASTUS**, King of Argos.

**MEDON**, High Priest of the Temple of Apollo at Argos.

**CRYTHES**, Captain of the Royal Guard.

**PHOCION**, son of Medon.

|                    |   |                      |
|--------------------|---|----------------------|
| <b>CTESIPHON</b> , | } | noble Argive youths. |
| <b>CASSANDER</b> , |   |                      |

**ION**, a foundling youth protected by Medon.

|                   |   |                 |
|-------------------|---|-----------------|
| <b>AGENOR</b> ,   | } | sages of Argos. |
| <b>CLEON</b> ,    |   |                 |
| <b>TIMOCLES</b> , |   |                 |

**IRUS**, a boy, slave of Agenor.

**CLEMANTHE**, Medon's daughter.

**ABRA**, attendant on Clemanthe.

SCENE—Argos.

THE TIME of the Action is comprised in one day and night,  
and the following morning.

I O N;  
A T R A G E D Y.

---

A C T I.

SCENE I.

*The Interior of the Temple of Apollo, which is supposed to be placed on a rocky eminence. Early morning. The interior lighted by a single lamp suspended from the roof. AGENOR resting against a column;—IRUS seated on a bench at the side of the scene.*

*AGENOR comes forward and speaks.*

AGENOR.

WILL the dawn never visit us? These hours  
Toil heavy with the unresting curse they bear  
To do the work of desolating years!  
All distant sounds are hush'd;—the shriek of death  
And the survivors' wail are now unheard,  
As grief had worn itself to patience. Irus!

A

I 'm loth so soon to break thy scanty rest,  
But my heart sickens for the tardy morn ;  
Sure it is breaking ;—speed and look—yet hold,  
Know'st thou the fearful shelf of rock that hangs  
Above the encroaching waves, the loftiest point  
That stretches eastward ?

IRUS.

Know it? Yes, my Lord ;  
There often have I bless'd the opening day,  
Which thy free kindness gave me leave to waste  
In happy wandering through the forests.

AGENOR.

Well,  
Thou art not then afraid to tread it ; there  
The earliest streak from the unrisen sun  
Is to be welcomed ;—tell me how it gleams,  
In bloody portent or in saffron hope,  
And hasten back to slumber.

IRUS.

I shall hasten :  
Believe not that thy summons broke my rest ;  
I was not sleeping. [Exit IRUS.]

AGENOR.

Heaven be with thee, child !  
His grateful mention of delights bestow'd  
On that most piteous state of servile childhood  
By liberal words chance-dropp'd, hath touch'd a vein  
Of feeling which I deem'd for ever numb'd,  
And, by a gush of household memories, breaks

The icy casing of that thick despair  
Which day by day hath gather'd o'er my heart,  
While, basely safe, within this column'd circle,  
Uplifted far into the purer air  
And by Apollo's partial love secured,  
I have, in spirit, glided with the Plague  
As in foul darkness or in sickliest light  
It wafted death through Argos ; and mine ears,  
Listening athirst for any human sound,  
Have caught the dismal cry of confused pain,  
Which to this dizzy height the fitful wind  
Hath borne from each sad quarter of the vale  
Where life was.

*Re-enter IRUS.*

Are there signs of day-break ?

IRUS,

None ;

The eastern sky is still unbroken gloom.

AGENOR.

It cannot surely be. Thine eyes are dim  
(No fault of thine) for want of rest, or now  
I look upon them near, with scalding tears.  
Hath care alighted on a head so young !  
What grief hast thou been weeping ?

IRUS.

Pardon me ;

I never thought at such a mournful time  
To plead my humble sorrow in excuse  
Of poorly-render'd service : but my brother —



Thou mayst have noted him,—a sturdy lad,  
With eye so merry and with foot so light  
That none could chide his gamesomeness—fell sick  
But yesterday, and died in my weak arms  
Ere I could seek for stouter aid : I hoped  
That I had taught my grief to veil its signs  
From thy observant care ; but when I stood  
Upon the well-known terrace where we loved,  
Arm link'd in arm, to watch the gleaming sails—  
His favourite pastime, for he burn'd to share  
A seaman's hardy lot,—my tears would flow,  
And I forgot to dry them. But I see  
Cleon is walking yonder ; let me call him ;  
For sure 'twill cheer thy heart to speak with him.

AGENOR.

Call him, good youth, and then go in to sleep,  
Or, if thou wilt, to weep. [Exit IRUS.]

I envy thee  
The privilege, but Jupiter forbend  
That I should rob thee of it !

*Enter* CLEON.

CLEON.

Hail, Agenor !  
Dark as our lot remains, 'tis comfort yet  
To find thy age unstricken.

AGENOR.

Rather mourn  
That I am destined still to linger here

In strange unnatural strength, while death is round me.  
I chide these sinews that are framed so tough  
Grief cannot palsy them ; I chide the air  
Which round this citadel of nature breathes  
With sweetness not of this world ; I would share  
The common grave of my dear countrymen,  
And sink to rest while all familiar things  
Old custom has endear'd are failing with me,  
Rather than shiver on in life behind them :  
Nor should these walls detain me from the paths  
Where death may be embraced, but that my word,  
In a rash moment plighted to our host,  
Forbids me to depart without his license,  
Which firmly he refuses.

CLEON.

Do not chide me

If I rejoice to find the generous Priest  
Means, with Apollo's blessing, to preserve  
The treasure of thy wisdom ;—nay, he trusts not  
To promises alone ; his gates are barr'd  
Against thy egress :—none, indeed, may pass them  
Save the youth Ion, to whose earnest prayer  
His foster-father grants reluctant leave  
To visit the sad city at his will :  
And freely does he use the dangerous boon,  
Which, in my thought, the love that cherish'd him,  
Since he was found within the sacred grove  
Smiling amidst the storm, a most rare infant,  
Should have had sternness to deny.

AGENOR.

What, Ion

The only inmate of this fane allow'd  
To seek the mournful walks where death is busy !—  
Ion our sometime darling, whom we prized  
As a stray gift, by bounteous Heaven dismiss'd  
From some bright sphere which sorrow may not cloud  
To make the happy happier ! Is *he* sent  
To grapple with the miseries of this time,  
Whose nature such ethereal aspect wears  
As it would perish at the touch of wrong ?  
By no internal contest is he train'd  
For such hard duty ; no emotions rude  
Hath his clear spirit vanquish'd ;—Love, the germ  
Of his mild nature, hath spread graces forth,  
Expanding with its progress, as the store  
Of rainbow colour which the seed conceals  
Sheds out its tints from its dim treasury,  
To flush and circle in the flower. No tear  
Hath fill'd his eye save that of thoughtful joy  
When, in the evening stillness, lovely things  
Press'd on his soul too busily ; his voice,  
If, in the earnestness of childish sports,  
Raised to the tone of anger, check'd its force,  
As if it fear'd to break its being's law,  
And falter'd into music ; when the forms  
Of guilty passion have been made to live  
In pictured speech, and others have wax'd loud  
In righteous indignation, he hath heard

With sceptic smile, or from some slender vein  
Of goodness, which surrounding gloom conceal'd,  
Struck sunlight o'er it: so his life hath flow'd  
From its mysterious urn a sacred stream,  
In whose calm depth the beautiful and pure  
Alone are mirror'd; which, though shapes of ill  
May hover round its surface, glides in light,  
And takes no shadow from them.

CLEON.

Yet, methinks,

Thou hast not lately met him, or a change  
Pass'd strangely on him had not miss'd thy wonder.  
His form appears dilated; in those eyes  
Where pleasure danced, a thoughtful sadness dwells;  
Stern purpose knits the forehead, which till now  
Knew not the passing wrinkle of a care:  
Those limbs which in their heedless motion own'd  
A stripling's playful happiness, are strung  
As if the iron hardships of the camp  
Had given them sturdy nurture; and his step,  
Its airiness of yesterday forgotten,  
Awakes the echoes of these desolate courts,  
As if a hero of gigantic mould  
Paced them in armour.

AGENOR.

Hope is in thy tale.

This is no freak of Nature's wayward course,  
But work of pitying Heaven; for not in vain  
The gods have pour'd into that guileless heart

The strengths that nerve the hero ;—they are ours.

CLEON.

How can he aid us ? Can he stay the pulse  
Of ebbing life,—arrest the infected winds,  
Or smite the hungry spectre of the grave ?

AGENOR.

And dost thou think these breezes are our foes,—  
The innocent airs that used to dance around us,  
As if they felt the blessings they convey'd,  
Or that the death they bear is casual ? No !  
'Tis human guilt that blackens in the cloud,  
Flashes athwart its mass in jagged fire,  
Whirls in the hurricane, pollutes the air,  
Turns all the joyous melodies of earth  
To murmurings of doom. There is a foe  
Who in the glorious summit of the state  
Draws down the great resentment of the gods,  
Whom he defies to strike us ;—yet his power  
Partakes that just infirmity which Nature  
Blends in the empire of her proudest sons—  
That it is cased within a single breast,  
And may be pluck'd thence by a single arm.  
Let but that arm, selected by the gods,  
Do its great office on the tyrant's life,  
And Argos breathes again !

CLEON.

A footstep !—hush !

Thy wishes, falling on a slavish ear,  
Would tempt another outrage : 'tis a friend—

An honest though a crabbed one—Timocles :

Something hath ruffled him.—Good day, Timocles !

[TIMOCLES passes in front.

He will not speak to us.

AGENOR.

But he *shall* speak.

Timocles—nay then, thus I must enforce thee ;

[*staying him.*

Sure thou wilt not refuse a comrade's hand

That may be cold ere sunset.

TIMOCLES. [giving his hand.

Thou mayst school me ;

Thy years and love have license : but I own not

A stripling's mastery ; is 't fit, Agenor ?

AGENOR.

Nay, thou must tell thy wrong ; whate'er it prove,

I hail thy anger as a hopeful sign,

For it revives the thought of household days,

When the small bickerings of friends had space

To fret, and Death was not for ever nigh

To frown upon Estrangement. What has moved thee ?

TIMOCLES.

I blush to tell it. Weary of the night

And of my life, I sought the western portal :

It opened, when ascending from the stair

That through the rock winds spiral from the town,

Ion, the foundling cherish'd by the Priest,

Stood in the entrance : with such mild command

As he has often smilingly obey'd,

I bade him stand aside and let me pass ;  
When—wouldst thou think it ?—in determined speech  
He gave me counsel to return : I press'd  
Impatient onward : he, with honied phrase  
His daring act excusing, grasp'd my arm  
With strength resistless ; led me from the gate ;  
Replaced its ponderous bars ; and, with a look  
As modest as he wore in childhood, left me.

AGENOR.

And thou wilt thank him for it soon ; he comes—  
Now hold thy angry purpose if thou canst !

*Enter ION.*

ION.

I seek thee, good Timocles, to implore  
Again thy pardon. I am young in trust,  
And fear lest, in the earnestness of love,  
I stayed thy course too rudely. Thou hast borne  
My childish folly often,—do not frown  
If I have ventured with unmanner'd zeal  
To guard the ripe experiences of years  
From one rash moment's danger.

TIMOCLES.

Leave thy care.

If I am weary of the flutterer life,  
Is mortal bidding thus to cage it in ?

ION.

And art thou tired of being ? Has the grave  
No terrors for thee ? Hast thou sunder'd quite

Those thousand meshes which old custom weaves  
To bind us earthward, and gay fancy films  
With airy lustre various ? Hast subdued  
Those cleavings of the spirit to its prison,  
Those nice regards, dear habits, pensive memories,  
That change the valour of the thoughtful breast  
To brave dissimulation of its fears ?  
Is Hope quench'd in thy bosom ? Thou art free,  
And in the simple dignity of man  
Standest apart untempted :—do not lose  
The great occasion thou hast pluck'd from misery,  
Nor play the spendthrift with a great despair,  
But use it nobly !

TIMOCLES.

What, to strike ? to slay ?

ION.

No !—not unless the audible voice of Heaven  
Call thee to that dire office ; but to shed  
On ears abused by falsehood, truths of power  
In words immortal,—not such words as flash  
From the fierce demagogue's unthinking rage  
To madden for a moment and expire,—  
Nor such as the rapt orator imbues  
With warmth of facile sympathy, and moulds  
To mirrors radiant with fair images,  
To grace the noble fervour of an hour ;—  
But words which bear the spirits of great deeds  
Wing'd for the Future ; which the dying breath  
Of Freedom's martyr shapes as it exhales,



And to the most enduring forms of earth  
Commits—to linger in the craggy shade  
Of the huge valley, 'neath the eagle's home,  
Or in the sea-cave where the tempest sleeps,  
Till some heroic leader bid them wake  
To thrill the world with echoes!—But I talk  
Of things above my grasp, which strangely press  
Upon my soul, and tempt me to forget  
The duties of my youth ;—pray you forgive me.

TIMOCLES.!

Have I not said so ?

AGENOR.

Welcome to the morn !

The eastern gates unfold, the Priest approaches ;  
[*As AGENOR speaks, the great gates at the back of the  
scene open ; the sea is discovered far beneath,—the  
dawn breaking over it ; MEDON, the Priest, enters  
attended.*]

And lo! the sun is struggling with the gloom,  
Whose masses fill the eastern sky, and tints  
Its edges with dull red ;—but he *will* triumph ;  
Bless'd be the omen !

MEDON.

God of light and joy,  
Once more delight us with thy healing beams !  
If I may trace thy language in the clouds  
That wait upon thy rising, help is nigh—  
But help achieved in blood.

ION.

Sayst thou in blood?

MEDON.

Yes, Ion!—why, he sickens at the word,  
Spite of his new-born strength ;—the sights of woe  
That he will seek have shed their paleness on him.  
Has this night's walk shown more than common sorrow?

ION.

I pass'd the palace where the frantic king  
Yet holds his crimson revel, whence the roar  
Of desperate mirth came, mingling with the sigh  
Of death-subdued robustness, and the gleam  
Of festal lamps mid spectral columns hung  
Flaunting o'er shapes of anguish made them ghastlier.  
How can I cease to tremble for the sad ones  
He mocks—and him the wretchedest of all?

TIMOCLES.

And canst thou pity him? Dost thou discern,  
Amidst his impious darings, plea for him?

ION.

Is he not childless, friendless, and a king?  
He 's human; and some pulse of good must live  
Within his nature—have ye tried to wake it?

MEDON.

Yes; I believe he felt our sufferings once;  
When, at my strong entreaty, he dispatch'd  
Phocion my son to Delphos, there to seek  
Our cause of sorrow; but, as time dragg'd on  
Without his messenger's return, he grew

Impatient of all counsel,—to his palace  
In awful mood retiring, wildly call'd  
The reckless of his court to share his stores  
And end all with him. When we dared disturb  
His dreadful feastings with a humble prayer  
That he would meet us, the poor slave, who bore  
The message, flew back smarting from the scourge,  
And mutter'd a decree that he who next  
Unbidden met the tyrant's glance should die.

AGENOR.

I am prepared to brave it.

CLEON.

So am I.

TIMOCLES.

And I—

ION.

O Sages, do not think my prayer  
Bespeaks unseemly forwardness—send me!  
The coarsest reed that trembles in the marsh,  
If Heaven select it for its instrument,  
May shed celestial music on the breeze  
As clearly as the pipe whose virgin gold  
Befits the lip of Phœbus;—ye are wise,  
And needed by your country; ye are fathers:  
I am a lone stray thing, whose little life  
By strangers' bounty cherish'd, like a wave  
That from the summer sea a wanton breeze  
Lifts for a moment's sparkle, will subside  
Light as it rose, nor leave a sigh in breaking.

MEDON.

Ion, no sigh!

ION.

Forgive me if I seem'd

To doubt that thou wilt mourn me if I fall;

Nor would I tax thy love with such a fear,

But that high promptings, which could never rise

Spontaneous in my nature, bid me plead

Thus boldly for the mission.

MEDON.

My brave boy!

It shall be as thou wilt. I see thou art call'd

To this great peril, and I will not stay thee.

When wilt thou be prepared to seek it?

ION.

Now.

Only before I go, thus, on my knee,

Let me in one word thank thee for a life

Made by thy love a cloudless holiday;

And O, my more than father! let me look

Up to thy face as if indeed a father's,

And give me a son's blessing.

MEDON.

Bless thee, son!

I should be marble now; let's part at once.

ION.

If I should not return, bless Phocion from me;

And, for Clemanthe—may I speak one word,

One parting word with my fair playfellow?

MEDON.

If thou wouldst have it so, thou shalt.

ION.

Farewell then!

Your prayers wait on my steps. The arm of Heaven  
I feel in life or death will be around me. [Exit.

MEDON.

O grant it be in life! Let's to the sacrifice. [Exit.

---

SCENE II.

*An apartment of the Temple. Enter CLEMANTHE  
followed by ABRA.*

CLEMANTHE.

Is he so changed?

ABRA.

His bearing is so alter'd,  
That, distant, I scarce knew him for himself;  
But, looking in his face, I felt his smile  
Gracious as ever, though its sweetness wore  
Unwonted sorrow in it.

CLEMANTHE.

He will go

To some high fortune, and forget us all,  
Reclaim'd (be sure of it) by noble parents;  
Me he forgets already; for five days,  
Five melancholy days, I have not seen him.

ABRA.

Thou knowest that he has privilege to range  
The infected city ; and, 'tis said, he spends  
The hours of needful rest in squalid hovels  
Where death is most forsaken.

CLEMANTHE.

Why is this ?

Why should my father, niggard of the lives  
Of aged men, be prodigal of youth  
So rich in glorious prophecy as his ?

ABRA.

He comes to answer for himself. I'll leave you. [*Exit.*

CLEMANTHE.

Stay ! Well my heart may guard its secret best  
By its own strength.

*Enter* ION.

ION.

How fares my pensive sister ?

CLEMANTHE.

How should I fare but ill when the pale hand  
Draws the black foldings of the eternal curtain  
Closer and closer round us—Phocion absent—  
And thou, forsaking all within thy home,  
Wilt risk thy life with strangers, in whose aid  
Even thou canst do but little ?

ION.

It is little :

But in these sharp extremities of fortune,

B

The blessings which the weak and poor can scatter  
Have their own season. 'Tis a little thing  
To give a cup of water ; yet its draught  
Of cool refreshment, drain'd by fever'd lips,  
May give a shock of pleasure to the frame  
More exquisite than when nectarean juice  
Renews the life of joy in happiest hours.  
It is a little thing to speak a phrase  
Of common comfort which by daily use  
Has almost lost its sense ; yet on the ear  
Of him who thought to die unmourn'd 'twill fall  
Like choicest music ; fill the glazing eye  
With gentle tears ; relax the knotted hand  
To know the bonds of fellowship again ;  
And shed on the departing soul a sense  
More precious than the benison of friends  
About the honor'd death-bed of the rich,  
To him who else were lonely, that another  
Of the great family is near and feels.

CLEMANTHE.

Oh, thou canst never bear these mournful offices !  
So blithe, so merry once ! Will not the sight  
Of frenzied agonies unfix thy reason,  
Or the dumb woe congeal thee ?

ION.

No, Clemanthe ;  
They are the patient sorrows that touch nearest !  
If thou hadst seen the warrior when he writhed  
In the last grapple of his sinewy frame

With conquering anguish, strive to cast a smile  
(And not in vain) upon his fragile wife,  
Waning beside him,—and, his limbs composed,  
The widow of the moment fix her gaze  
Of longing, speechless love, upon the babe,  
The only living thing which yet was hers,  
Spreading its arms for its own resting-place,  
Yet with attenuated hand wave off  
The unstricken child, and so embraceless die,  
Stifling the mighty hunger of the heart ;  
Thou couldst endure the sight of selfish grief  
In sullenness or frenzy ;—but to-day  
Another lot falls on me.

CLEMANTHE.

Thou wilt leave us !

I read it plainly in thy alter'd mien ;—  
Is it for ever ?

ION.

That is with the gods !  
I go but to the palace, urged by hope,  
Which from afar hath darted on my soul,  
That to the humbleness of one like me  
The haughty king may listen.

CLEMANTHE.

To the palace !

Knowest thou the peril—nay the certain issue  
That waits thee ? Death !—The tyrant has decreed it,  
Confirmed it with an oath ; and he has power  
To keep that oath ; for, hated as he is,



The reckless soldiers who partake his riot  
Are swift to do his bidding.

ION.

I know all ;  
But they who call me to the work can shield me,  
Or make me strong to suffer.

CLEMANTHE.

Then the sword  
Falls on thy neck ! O Gods ! to think that thou,  
Who in the plenitude of youthful life  
Art now before me, ere the sun decline,  
Perhaps in one short hour shalt lie cold, cold,  
To speak, smile, bless no more !—Thou shalt not go !

ION.

Thou must not stay me, fair one ; even thy father,  
Who (blessings on him !) loves me as his son,  
Yields to the will of Heaven.

CLEMANTHE.

And he can do this !  
I shall not bear his presence if thou fallest  
By his consent ; so shall I be alone.

ION.

Phocion will soon return, and juster thoughts  
Of thy admiring father close the gap  
Thy old companion left behind him.

CLEMANTHE.

Never !

What will to me be father, brother, friends,  
When thou art gone—the light of our life quench'd—

Haunting like spectres of departed joy  
The home where thou wert dearest?

ION.

Thrill me not

With words that, in their agony, suggest  
A hope too ravishing,—or my head will swim,  
And my heart faint within me.

CLEMANTHE.

Has my speech

Such blessed power?—I will not mourn it then,  
Though it hath told a secret I had borne  
Till death in silence:—how affection grew  
To this, I know not;—day succeeded day,  
Each fraught with the same innocent delights,  
Without one shock to ruffle the disguise  
Of sisterly regard which veil'd it well,  
Till thy changed mien reveal'd it to my soul,  
And thy great peril makes me bold to tell it.  
Do not despise it in me!

ION.

With deep joy

Thus I receive it. Trust me, it is long  
Since I have learn'd to tremble midst our pleasures,  
Lest I should break the golden dream around me  
With most ungrateful rashness. I should bless  
The sharp and perilous duty which hath press'd  
A life's deliciousness into these moments,—  
Which here must end. I came to say farewell;  
And the word must be said.

CLEMANTHE.

Thou canst not mean it!

Have I disclaim'd all maiden bashfulness,  
To tell the cherish'd secret of my soul  
To my soul's master, and in rich return  
Obtain'd the dear assurance of his love,  
To hear him speak that miserable word  
I cannot—will not echo?

ION.

Heaven has call'd me,  
And I have pledged my honor. When thy heart  
Bestow'd its preference on a friendless boy,  
Thou didst not image him a recreant; nor  
Must he prove so, by thy election crown'd.  
Thou hast endowed me with the right to claim  
Thy help through this our journey, be its course  
Lengthen'd to age, or in an hour to end,  
And now I ask it!—bid my courage hold,  
And with thy free approval send me forth  
In soul apparell'd for my office!

CLEMANTHE.

Go!

I would not have thee other than thou art,  
Living or dying—and if thou shouldst fall—

ION.

Be sure I shall return.

CLEMANTHE.

If thou shouldst fall,  
I shall be happier as the affianced bride

Of thy cold ashes, than in proudest fortunes—

Thine—ever thine—

*[she faints in his arms.]*

ION. *[calls.]*

Abra!—So best to part— *[Enter ABRA.]*

Let her have air; be near her through the day;

I know thy tenderness—should ill news come

Of any friend, she will require it all.

*[ABRA bears CLEMANTHE out.]*

Ye Gods, that have enrich'd the life ye claim

With priceless treasure, strengthen me to yield it!

*[Exit.]*

END OF ACT I.

ADRASTUS.

Let them blast me now !—

I stir not ; tremble not ; these massive walls,  
Whose date o'erawes tradition, gird the home  
Of a great race of kings, along whose line  
The eager mind lives aching, through the darkness  
Of ages else unstoried, till its shapes  
Of armed sovereigns spread to godlike port,  
And, frowning in the uncertain dawn of time,  
Strike awe, as powers who ruled an elder world,  
In mute obedience. I, sad heriter  
Of all their glories, feel our doom is nigh ;  
And I will meet it as befits their fame ;  
Nor will I vary my selected path  
The breadth of my sword's edge, nor check a wish,  
If such unkingly yielding might avert it.

CRYTHES.

Thou art ever royal in thy thoughts.

ADRASTUS.

No more—

I would be private.

[Exit CRYTHES.]

Groveling parasite !

Why should I waste these fate-environ'd hours,  
And pledge my great defiance to despair  
With flatterers such as thou ;—as if my joys  
Required the pale reflections cast by slaves  
In mirror'd mockery round my throne, or lack'd  
The aid of reptile sympathies to stream  
Through fate's black pageantry ? Let weakness seek

Companionship : I 'll henceforth feast alone.

*Enter a Soldier.*

SOLDIER.

My liege, forgive me.

ADRASTUS.

Well! Speak out at once

Thy business, and retire.

SOLDIER.

I have no part

In the presumptuous message that I bear.

ADRASTUS.

Tell it, or go. There is no time to waste  
On idle terrors:

SOLDIER.

Thus it is, my lord :—

As we were burnishing our arms, a man  
Enter'd the court, and when we saw him first  
Was tending towards the palace ; in amaze,  
We hail'd the rash intruder ; still he walk'd  
Unheeding onward, till the western gate  
Barr'd further course ; then turning, he besought  
Our startled band to herald him to thee,  
That he might urge a message which the sages  
Had charged him to deliver.

ADRASTUS.

Ha ! the greybeards

Who, mid the altars of the gods, conspire  
To cast the image of supernal power

From earth its shadow consecrates. What sage  
Is so resolved to play the orator  
That he would die for 't?

SOLDIER.

He is but a youth,  
Yet urged his prayer with a sad constancy  
Which could not be denied.

ADRASTUS.

Most bravely plann'd !  
Sedition worthy of the reverend host  
Of sophist traitors ; brave to scatter fancies  
Of discontent midst sturdy artisans,  
Whose honest sinews they direct unseen,  
And make their proxies in the work of peril !—  
'Tis fit, when burning to insult their king,  
And warn'd the pleasure must be bought with life,  
Their valour send a boy to speak their wisdom !  
Thou know'st my last decree ; tell this rash youth  
The danger he incurs ;—then let him pass,  
And own the king more gentle than his masters.

SOLDIER.

We have already told him of the fate  
Which waits his daring ; courteously he thank'd us,  
But still with solemn accent urged his suit.

ADRASTUS.

Tell him once more, if he persists, he dies—  
Then, if he will, admit him. Should he hold  
His purpose, order Crythes to conduct him,  
And see the headsman instantly prepare

To do his office.

[*Exit* SOLDIER.]

So resolved, so young—

'Twere pity he should fall ; yet he *must* fall,

Or the great sceptre, which hath sway'd the fears

Of ages, will become a common staff

For youth to wield or age to rest upon,

Despoil'd of all its virtues. He *must* fall,

Else they who prompt the insult will grow bold,

And with their pestilent vauntings through the city

Raise the low fog of murky discontent,

Which now creeps harmless through its *marshy birth-*  
place,

To veil my setting glories. He is warn'd ;

And if he cross yon threshold, he shall die.

*Enter* CRYTHES and ION.

CRYTHES.

The king !

ADRASTUS.

Stranger, I bid thee welcome ;

We are about to tread the same dark passage,

Thou almost on the instant.—Is the sword

[*To* CRYTHES.]

Of justice sharpen'd, and the headsman ready ?

CRYTHES.

Thou mayst behold them plainly in the court ;

Even now the solemn soldiers line the ground,

The steel gleams on the altar ; and the slave

Disrobes himself for duty.



Which holds its course thus bravely ? What great wars  
Have nursed the courage that can look on death,  
Certain and speedy death, with placid eye ?

ION.

I am a simple youth, who never bore  
The weight of armèur,—one who may not boast  
Of noble birth or valour of his own.  
Deem not the powers which nerve me thus to speak  
In thy great presence, and have made my heart  
Upon the verge of bloody death as calm,  
As equal in its beatings, as when sleep  
Approach'd me nestling from the sportive toils  
Of thoughtless childhood, and celestial dreams  
Began to glimmer through the deepening shadows  
Of soft oblivion, to belong to me !—  
These are the strengths of Heaven ; to thee they speak,  
Bid thee to hearken to thy people's cry,  
Or warn thee that thy hour must shortly come !

ADRASTUS.

I know it must ; so mayst thou spare thy warnings.  
The envious gods in me have doom'd a race,  
Whose glories stream from the same cloud-girt founts,  
Whence their own dawn'd upon the infant world ;  
And I shall sit on my ancestral throne  
To meet their vengeance ; but till then I rule  
As I have ever ruled, and thou wilt feel.

ION.

I will not further urge thy safety to thee ;  
It may be, as thou sayst, too late ; nor seek

To make thee tremble at the gathering curse  
Which shall burst forth in mockery at thy fall ;  
But thou art gifted with a nobler sense—  
I know thou art, my sovereign!—sense of pain  
Endured by myriad Argives, in whose souls,  
And in whose father's souls, thou and thy fathers  
Have kept their cherish'd state ; whose heartstrings, still  
The living fibres of thy rooted power,  
Quiver with agonies thy crimes have drawn  
From heavenly justice on them.

ADRASTUS.

How ! my crimes ?

ION.

Yes ; 'tis the eternal law, that where guilt is,  
Sorrow shall answer it ; and thou hast not  
A poor man's privilege to bear alone,  
Or in the narrow circle of his kinsmen,  
The penalties of evil, for in thine  
A nation's fate lies circled.—King Adrastus !  
Steel'd as thy heart is with the usages  
Of pomp and power, a few short summers since  
Thou wert a child, and canst not be relentless.  
Oh, if maternal love embraced thee then,  
Think of the mothers who with eyes unwet  
Glare o'er their perishing children : hast thou shared  
The glow of a first friendship, which is born  
Midst the rude sports of boyhood, think of youth  
Smitten amidst its playthings ;—let the spirit  
Of thy own innocent childhood whisper pity !

ADRASTUS.

In every word thou dost but steel my soul.  
My youth was blasted;—parents, brother, kin—  
All that should people infancy with joy—  
Conspired to poison mine; despoiled my life  
Of innocence and hope—all but the sword  
And sceptre—dost thou wonder at me now?

ION.

I knew that we should pity—

ADRASTUS.

Pity! dare  
To speak that word again, and torture waits thee!  
I am yet king of Argos. Well, go on—  
Thy time is short, and I am pledged to hear.

ION.

If thou hast ever loved—

ADRASTUS.

Beware! beware!

ION.

Thou hast! I see thou hast! Thou art not marble,  
And thou shalt hear me!—Think upon the time  
When the clear depths of thy yet lucid soul  
Were ruffled with the troublings of strange joy,  
As if some unseen visitant from heaven  
Touch'd the calm lake and wreath'd its images  
In sparkling waves;—recall the dallying hope  
That on the margin of assurance trembled,  
As loth to lose in certainty too bless'd  
Its happy being;—taste in thought again

Of the stolen sweetness of those evening-walks,  
When pansied turf was air to winged feet,  
And circling forests, by ethereal touch  
Enchanted, wore the livery of the sky,  
As if about to melt in golden light  
Shapes of one heavenly vision ; and thy heart,  
Enlarged by its new sympathy with one,  
Grew bountiful to all !

ADRASTUS.

That tone ! that tone !

Whence came it ? from thy lips ? It cannot be—  
The long-hush'd music of the only voice  
That ever spake unbought affection to me,  
And waked my soul to blessing !—O sweet hours  
Of golden joy, ye come ! your glories break  
Through my pavilion'd spirit's sable folds !  
Roll on ! roll on !—Stranger, thou dost enforce me  
To speak of things unbreathed by lip of mine  
To human ear :—wilt listen ?

ION.

As a child.

ADRASTUS.

Again ! that voice again !—thou hast seen me moved  
As never mortal saw me, by a tone  
Which some light breeze, enamour'd of the sound,  
Hath wafted through the woods, till thy young voice  
Caught it to rive and melt me. At my birth  
This city, which, expectant of its Prince,  
Lay hush'd, broke out in clamorous ecstasies ;

Yet, in that moment, while the uplifted cups  
 Foam'd with the choicest product of the sun,  
 And welcome thunder'd from a thousand throats,  
 My doom was seal'd. From the hearth's vacant space,  
 In the dark chamber where my mother lay,  
 Faint with the sense of pain-bought happiness,  
 Came forth, in heart-appalling tone, these words  
 Of me the nurseling—"Woe unto the babe!  
 "Against the life which now begins shall life  
 "Lighted from thence be arm'd, and, both soon quench'd,  
 "End this great line in sorrow!—Ere I grew  
 Of years to know myself a thing accursed,  
 A second son was born, to steal the love  
 Which fate had else scarce rifled: he became  
 My parents' hope, the darling of the crew  
 Who lived upon their smiles, and thought it flattery  
 To trace in every foible of my youth—  
 A prince's youth!—the workings of the curse;  
 My very mother—Jove! I cannot bear  
 To speak it now—look'd freezingly upon me!

ION.

But thy brother—

ADRASTUS.

Died. Thou hast heard the lie,  
 The common lie that every peasant tells  
 Of me his master,—that I slew the boy.  
 'Tis false! One summer's eve, below a crag  
 Which, in his wilful mood, he strove to climb,  
 He lay a mangled corpse: the very slaves,

Whose cruelty had shut him from my heart,  
Now coin'd their own injustice into proofs  
To brand me as his murderer.

ION.

Did they dare  
Accuse thee?

ADRASTUS.

Not in open speech :—they felt  
I should have seized the miscreant by the throat,  
And crush'd the lie half-spoken with the life  
Of the base speaker ;—but the tale look'd out  
From the stolen gaze of coward eyes, which shrank  
When mine have met them ; murmur'd through the crowd  
That at the sacrifice, or feast, or game,  
Stood distant from me ; burnt into my soul  
When I beheld it in my father's shudder !

ION.

Didst not declare thy innocence?

ADRASTUS.

To whom?  
To parents who could doubt me ? To the ring  
Of grave impostors, or their shallow sons,  
Who should have studied to prevent my wish  
Before it grew to language ; hail'd my choice  
To service as a prize to wrestle for ;  
And whose reluctant courtesy I bore,  
Pale with proud anger, till from lips compress'd  
The blood has started ? To the common herd,  
The vassals of our ancient house, the mass

Of bones and muscles framed to till the soil  
A few brief years, then rot unnamed beneath it,  
Or, deck'd for slaughter at their master's call,  
To smite and to be smitten, and lie crush'd  
In heaps to swell his glory or his shame?  
Answer to them: No! though my heart had burst,  
As it was nigh to bursting!—To the mountains  
I fled, and on their pinnacles of snow  
Breasted the icy wind, in hope to cool  
My spirit's fever—struggled with the oak  
In search of weariness, and learn'd to rive  
Its stubborn boughs, till limbs once lightly strung,  
Might mate in cordage with its infant stems;  
Or on the sea-beat rock tore off the vest  
Which burnt upon my bosom, and to air  
Headlong committed, clove the water's depth  
Which plummet never sounded;—but in vain.

ION.

Yet succour came to thee?

ADRASTUS.

A blessed one!

Which the strange magic of thy voice revives,  
And thus unlocks my soul. My rapid steps  
Were in a wood-encircled valley stay'd  
By the bright vision of a maid, whose face  
Most lovely more than loveliness reveal'd,  
In touch of patient grief, which dearer seem'd  
Than happiness to spirit sear'd like mine.  
With feeble hands she strove to lay in earth

The body of her aged sire, whose death  
Left her alone. I aided her sad work,  
And soon two lonely ones by holy rites  
Became one happy being. Days, weeks, months,  
In streamlike unity flow'd silent by us  
In our delightful nest. My father's spies—  
Slaves, whom my nod should have consign'd to stripes  
Or the swift falchion—track'd our sylvan home  
Just as my bosom knew its second joy,  
And, spite of fortune, I embraced a son.

ION.

Urged by thy trembling parents to avert  
That dreadful prophecy?

ADRASTUS.

Fools! did they deem  
Its worst accomplishment could match the ill  
Which they wrought on me? It had left unharm'd  
A thousand ecstasies of passion'd years,  
Which, tasted once, live ever, and disdain  
Fate's iron grapple! Could I now behold  
That son with knife uplifted at my heart,  
A moment ere my life-blood follow'd it,  
I would embrace him with my dying eyes,  
And pardon destiny! While jocund smiles  
Wreathed on the infant's face; as if sweet spirits  
Suggested pleasant fancies to its soul,  
The ruffians broke upon us; seized the child;  
Dash'd through the thicket to the beetling rock  
'Neath which the deep wave eddies: I stood still



As stricken into stone : I heard him cry,  
 Press'd by the rudeness of the murderer's gripe,  
 Severer ill unfearing—then the splash  
 Of waters that shall cover him for ever;  
 And could not stir to save him !

ION.

And the mother—

ADRASTUS.

She spake no word, but clasp'd me in her arms,  
 And lay her down to die. A lingering gaze  
 Of love she fix'd on me—none other loved,  
 And so pass'd hence. By Jupiter, her look !  
 Her dying patience glimmers in thy face !  
 She lives again ! She looks upon me now !  
 There 's magic in 't. Bear with me—I am childish.

*Enter CRYTHES and Guards.*

ADRASTUS.

Why art thou here ?

CRYTHES.

The dial points the hour.

ADRASTUS.

Dost thou not see that horrid purpose pass'd ?

Hast thou no heart—no sense ?

CRYTHES.

Scarce half an hour

Hath flown since the command on which I wait.

ADRASTUS.

Scarce half an hour !—years—years have roll'd since then.

Begone ! remove that pageantry of death—  
It blasts my sight—and hearken ! Touch a hair  
Of this brave youth, or look on him as now  
With thy cold headsman's eye, and yonder band  
Shall not expect a fearful show in vain.  
Hence without word. [Exit CRYTHES.

What wouldst thou have me do ?

ION.

Let thy awaken'd heart speak its own language ;  
Convene thy Sages ;—frankly, nobly meet them ;  
Explore with them the pleasure of the gods,  
And, whatsoever the sacrifice, perform it.

ADRASTUS.

Well ! I will seek their presence in an hour ;  
Go summon them, young hero : hold ! no word  
Of the strange passion thou hast witness'd here.

ION.

Distrust me not.—Benignant Powers, I thank ye ! [Exit.

ADRASTUS.

Yet stay—he 's gone—his spell is on me yet ;  
What have I promised him ? To meet the men  
Who from my living head would strip the crown  
And sit in judgment on me ?—I must do it—  
Yet shall my band be ready to o'erawe  
The course of liberal speech, and, if it rise  
So as too loudly to offend my ear,  
Strike the rash brawler dead !—What idle dream  
Of long-past days had melted me ? It fades—  
It vanishes—I am again a king !

## SCENE II.

*The Interior of the Temple.*

[Same as ACT I. SCENE I.]

[CLEMANTHE seated—ABRA attending her.]

ABRA.

Look, dearest lady!—the thin smoke aspires  
In the calm air, as when in happier times  
It show'd the gods propitious; wilt thou seek  
Thy chamber, lest thy father and his friends,  
Returning, find us hinderers of their council?  
She answers not—she hearkens not—with joy  
Could I believe her, for the first time, sullen!  
Still she is rapt.

[Enter AGENOR.]

O speak to my sweet mistress;  
Haply thy voice may rouse her.

AGENOR.

Dear Clemanthe,  
Hope dawns in every omen; we shall hail  
Our tranquil hours again.

*Enter MEDON, CLEON, TIMOCLES, and others.*

MEDON.

Clemanthe here!  
How sad! how pale!

ABRA.

Her eye is kindling—hush!

CLEMANTHÉ.

Hark! hear ye not a distant footstep?

MEDON.

No.

Look round, my fairest child; thy friends are near thee.

CLEMANTHÉ.

Yes!—now 'tis lost—'tis on that endless stair—

Nearer and more distinct—'tis his—'tis his—

He lives! he comes!

[CLEMANTHÉ rises and rushes to the back of the stage,  
at which ION appears, and returns with her.]

Here is your messenger,

Whom Heaven has rescued from the tyrant's rage

Ye sent him forth to brave. Rejoice, old men,

That ye are guiltless of his blood!—why pause ye?

Why shout ye not his welcome?

MEDON.

Dearest girl,

This is no scene for thee; go to thy chamber;

I'll come to thee ere long.

[Exeunt CLEMANTHÉ and ABRA.]

She is o'erwrought

By fear and joy for one whose infant hopes

Were mingled with her own, even as a brother's.

TIMOCLES.

Ion!

How shall we do thee honor?

ION.

None is due.

Save to the gods whose gracious influence sways  
 The king ye deem'd relentless ;—he consents  
 To meet ye presently in council :—speed ;  
 This may be nature's latest rally in him,  
 In fitful strength, ere it be quench'd for ever !

MEDON.

Haste to your seats ; I will but speak a word  
 With our brave friend, and follow : though convened  
 In speed, let our assembly lack no forms  
 Of due observance, which to furious power  
 Plead with the silent emphasis of years.

{ *Exeunt all but MEDON and ION.*

Ion, draw near me ; this eventful day  
 Hath shown thy nature's graces circled round  
 With firmness which accomplishes the hero ;—  
 And it would bring to me but one proud thought—  
 That virtues which required not culture's aid  
 Shed their first fragrance 'neath my roof, and there  
 Found shelter ;—but it also hath reveal'd  
 What I may not hide from thee, that my child,  
 My blithe and innocent girl—more fair in soul,  
 More delicate in fancy than in mould—  
 Loves thee with other than a sister's love.  
 I should have cared for this : I vainly deem'd  
 A fellowship in childhood's thousand joys  
 And household memories had nurtured friendship  
 Which might hold blameless empire in the soul ;

But in that guise the traitor hath stolen in,  
And the fair citadel is thine.

ION.

'Tis true.

I did not think the nursing of thy house  
Could thus disturb its holiest inmate's duty  
With tale of selfish passion;—but we met  
As playmates who might never meet again,  
And then the hidden truth flash'd forth, and show'd  
To each the image in the other's soul  
In one bright instant.

MEDON.

Be that instant blest

Which made thee truly ours. My son! my son!  
'Tis we should feel uplifted, for the seal  
Of greatness is upon thee; yet I know  
That when the gods, won by thy virtues, draw  
The veil which now conceals their lofty birthplace,  
Thou wilt not spurn the maid who prized them lowly.

ION.

Spurn her! My father!

*Enter CTESIPHON.*

MEDON.

Ctesiphon!—and breathless—

Art come to chide me to the council?

CTESIPHON.

No;

To bring unwonted joy; thy son approaches.

MEDON.

Thank Heaven! Hast spoken with him? Is he well?

CTESIPHON.

I strove in vain to reach him, for the crowd,  
Roused from the untended couch and dismal hearth  
By the strange visiting of hope, press'd round him!  
But, by his head erect and fiery glance,  
I know that he is well, and that he bears  
A message which shall shake the tyrant. [*Shouts.*] See!  
The throng is tending this way—now it parts,  
And yields him to thy arms.

*Enter* PHOCION.

MEDON.

Welcome, my Phocion—

Long waited for in Argos; how detain'd  
Now matters not, since thou art here in joy.  
Hast brought the answer of the god?

PHOCION.

I have:

Now let Adrastus tremble!

MEDON.

May we hear it?

PHOCION.

I am sworn first to utter it to him.

CTESIPHON.

But it is fatal to him!—Say but that!

PHOCION.

Ha, Ctesiphon!—I mark'd thee not before;

How fares thy father ?

ION. [*to PHOCION.*]

Do not speak of him.

CTESIPHON. [*overhearing ION.*]

Not speak of him ! Dost think there is a moment

When common things eclipse the burning thought

Of him and vengeance ?

PHOCION.

Has the tyrant's sword—

CTESIPHON.

No, Phocion ; that were merciful and brave

Compared to his base deed ; yet will I tell it

To make the flashing of thine eye more deadly,

And edge thy words that they may rive his heartstrings.

The last time that Adrastus dared to face

The Sages of the state, although my father,

Yielding to nature's mild decay, had left

All worldly toil and hope, he gather'd strength,

In his old seat, to speak one word of warning.

Thou know'st how bland with years his wisdom grew,

And with what phrases, steep'd in love, he sheath'd

The sharpness of rebuke ; yet, ere his speech

Was closed, the tyrant started from his throne,

And with his base hand smote him ;—'twas his death-  
stroke !

The old man totter'd home, and only once

Raised his head after.

PHOCION.

Thou wert absent ? Yes !



The royal miscreant lives!

CTESIPHON.

Had I beheld

That sacrilege, the tyrant had lain dead,  
Or I had been torn piecemeal by his minions.  
But I was far away: when I return'd,  
I found my father on the nearest bench  
Within our door, his thin silver'd head  
Supported by wan hands, which hid his face,  
And would not be withdrawn;—no groan, no sigh  
Was audible, and we might only learn  
By short convulsive tremblings of his frame  
That life still flicker'd in it—yet at last,  
By some unearthly inspiration roused,  
He dropp'd his wither'd hands, and sat erect  
As in his manhood's glory—the free blood  
Flush'd crimson through his cheeks, his furrow'd brow  
Expanded clear, and his eyes opening full  
Gleam'd with a youthful fire;—I fell in awe  
Upon my knees before him—still he spake not,  
But slowly raised his arm untrembling; clench'd  
His hand as if it grasp'd an airy knife,  
And struck in air: my hand was join'd with his  
In nervous grasp—my lifted eye met his  
In steadfast gaze—my pressure answer'd his—  
We knew at once each other's thought; a smile  
Of the old sweetness play'd upon his lips,  
And life forsook him. Weaponless I flew  
To seek the tyrant, and was driven with scoffs.

From the proud gates which shelter him. He lives—  
And I am here to babble of revenge!

PHOCION.

It comes, my friend—haste with me to the king!

ION.

Even while we speak, Adrastus meets his council;  
There let us seek him: should ye find him touch'd  
With penitence, as happily ye may,  
O give allowance to his soften'd nature!

CRÆSIPHON.

Show grace to him!—Dost dare?—I had forgot,  
Thou dost not know how a son loves a father!

ION.

I know enough to feel for thee; I know  
Thou hast endured the vilest wrong that tyranny  
In its worst frenzy can inflict;—yet think,  
O think! before the irrevocable deed  
Shuts out all thought, how much of power's excess  
Is theirs who raise the idol:—do we groan  
Beneath the personal force of this rash man,  
Who forty summers since hung at the breast  
A playful weakling; whom the heat unnerves,  
The north-wind pierces; and the hand of death  
May, in a moment, change to clay as vile  
As that of the scourged slave whose chains it severs?  
No! 'tis our weakness gasping, or the shows  
Of outward strength that builds up tyranny,  
And makes it look so glorious:—If we shrink  
Faint-hearted from the reckoning of our span

Of mortal days, we pamper the fond wish  
For long duration in a line of kings :  
If the rich pageantry of thoughts must fade  
All unsubstantial as the regal hues  
Of eve which purpled them, our cunning frailty  
Must robe a living image with their pomp,  
And wreath a diadem around its brow,  
In which our sunny fantasies may live  
Empearl'd, and gleam, in fatal splendour, far  
On after ages. We must look *within*  
For that which makes us slaves ;—on sympathies  
Which find no kindred objects in the plain  
Of common life—affections that aspire  
In air too thin—and fancy's dewy film,  
Floating for rest ; for even such delicate threads,  
Gather'd by fate's engrossing hand, supply  
The eternal spindle whence she weaves the bond  
Of cable strength in which our nature struggles !

CTESIPHON.

Go talk to others if thou wilt ;—to me  
All argument, save that of steel, is idle.

MEDON.

No more ;—let 's to the council—there, my son,  
Tell thy great message nobly ;—and for thee,  
Poor orphan'd youth, be sure the gods are just !

[*Exeunt.*]

## SCENE III.

*The great Square of the City. ADRASTUS seated on a throne; AGENOR, TIMOCLES, CLEON, and others, seated as Councillors—Soldiers line the stage at a distance.*

ADRASTUS.

Upon your summons, Sages, I am here ;  
Your king attends to know your pleasure ; speak it !

AGENOR.

And canst thou ask ? If the heart dead within thee  
Receives no impress of this awful time,  
Art thou of sense forsaken ? Are thine ears  
So charm'd by strains of slavish minstrelsy  
That the dull groan and frenzy-pointed shriek  
Pass them unheard to Heaven ? Or are thine eyes  
So conversant with prodigies of grief,  
They cease to dazzle at them ? Art thou arm'd  
'Gainst wonder, while, in all things, Nature turns  
To dreadful contraries ;—while Youth's full cheek  
Is shrivell'd into furrows of sad years,  
And 'neath its glossy curls untinged by care  
Looks out a keen anatomy ;—while Age  
Is stung by feverish torture for an hour  
Into youth's strength ; while fragile Womanhood  
Starts into frightful courage, all unlike  
The gentle strength its gentle weakness feeds  
To make affliction beautiful, and stalks

Abroad, a tearless, an unshuddering thing ;—  
While Childhood, in its orphan'd freedom blithe,  
Finds, in the shapes of wretchedness which seem  
Grotesque to its unsadden'd vision, cause  
For dreadful mirth that shortly shall be hush'd  
In never-broken silence ; and while Love,  
Immortal through all change, makes ghastly Death  
Its idol, and with furious passion digs  
Amid sepulchral images for gauds  
To cheat its fancy with ?—Do sights like these  
Glare through the realm thou shouldst be parent to,  
And canst thou find the voice to ask “ our pleasure ?”

ADRASTUS.

Cease, babbler ;—wherefore would ye stun my ears  
With vain recital of the griefs I know,  
And cannot heal ?—will treason turn aside  
The shafts of fate, or medicine Nature's ills ?  
I have no skill in pharmacy, nor power  
To sway the elements.

AGENOR.

Thou hast the power  
To cast thyself upon the earth with us  
In penitential shame ; or, if this power  
Hath left a heart made weak by luxury  
And hard by pride, thou hast at least the power  
To cease the mockery of thy frantic revels.

ADRASTUS.

I have yet power to punish insult—look  
I use it not, Agenor !—Fate may dash

My sceptre from me, but shall not command  
My will to hold it with a feebler grasp ;  
Nay, if few hours of empire yet are mine,  
They shall be colour'd with a sterner pride,  
And peopled with more lustrous joys than flush'd  
In the serene procession of its greatness,  
Which look'd perpetual, as the flowing course  
Of human things. Have ye beheld a pine  
That clasp'd the mountain-summit with a root  
As firm as its rough marble, and, apart  
From the huge shade of undistinguish'd trees,  
Lifted its head as in delight to share  
The evening glories of the sky, and taste  
The wanton dalliance of the heavenly breeze  
That no ignoble vapour from the vale  
Could mingle with—smit by the flaming marl,  
And lighted for destruction ? How it stood  
One glorious moment, fringed and wreathed with fire  
Which show'd the inward graces of its shape,  
Uncumber'd now, and midst its topmost boughs,  
That young Ambition's airy fancies made  
Their giddy nest, leap'd sportive ;—never clad  
By liberal summer in a pomp so rich  
As waited on its downfall, while it took  
The storm-cloud roll'd behind it for a curtain  
To gird its splendours round, and made the blast  
Its minister to whirl its flashing shreds  
Aloft towards heaven, or to the startled depths  
Of forests that afar might share its doom !

So shall the royalty of Argos pass  
In festal blaze to darkness ! Have ye spoken ?

AGENOR.

I speak no more to thee !—Great Jove, look down !

[*Shouting without.*]

ADRASTUS.

What factious brawl is this ?—disperse it, soldiers.

[*Shouting renewed—As some of the soldiers are about to march, PHOCION rushes in, followed by CTESIPHON, ION, and MEDON.*]

Whence is this insolent intrusion ?

PHOCION.

King !

I bear Apollo's answer to thy prayer.

ADRASTUS.

Has not thy travel taught thy knee its duty ?

Here we had school'd thee better.

PHOCION.

Kneel to thee !

MEDON.

Patience, my son ! Do homage to the king.

PHOCION.

Never !—thou talk'st of schooling—know, Adrastus,  
That I have studied in a nobler school  
Than the dull haunt of venal sophistry  
Or the lewd guard-room ;—o'er which ancient heaven  
Extends its arch for all, and mocks the span  
Of palaces and dungeons ; where the heart  
In its free beatings, 'neath the coarsest vest,

Claims kindred with diviner things than power  
Of kings can raise or stifle—in the school  
Of mighty Nature—where I learn'd to blush  
At sight like this, of thousands basely hush'd  
Before a man no mightier than themselves,  
Save in the absence of that love that softens.

ADRASTUS.

Peace! speak thy message.

PHOCION.

Shall I tell it here?

Or shall I seek thy couch at dead of night,  
And breathe it in low whispers?—As thou wilt.

ADRASTUS.

Here—and this instant!

PHOCION.

Hearken then, Adrastus,  
And hearken, Argives—thus Apollo speaks:—

[*Reads a scroll.*]

“ Argos ne'er shall find release

“ Till her monarch's race shall cease.”

ADRASTUS.

'Tis not God's will, but man's sedition speaks:—  
Guards! tear that lying parchment from his hands,  
And bear him to the palace.

MEDON.

Touch him not,—

He is Apollo's messenger, whose lips  
Were never stain'd with falsehood.



PHOCION.

Come on, all !

AGENOR.

Surround him, friends ! Die with him !

ADRASTUS.

Soldiers, charge

Upon these rebels ; hew them down. On, on !

*The soldiers advance and surround the people ; they seize PHOCION. ION rushes from the back of the stage, and throws himself between ADRASTUS and PHOCION.*

PHOCION to ADRASTUS.

Yet I defy thee.

ION.

[To PHOCION.] Friend ! for sake of all,

Enrage him not—wait while I speak a word—

[To ADRASTUS.] My sovereign, I implore thee, do not stain

This sacred place with blood ; in Heaven's great name  
I do conjure thee—and in *hers*, whose spirit  
Is mourning for thee now !

ADRASTUS.

Release the stripling—

Let him go spread his treason where he will :

He is not worth my anger. To the palace !

ION.

Nay, yet an instant !—let my speech have power  
From Heaven to move thee further : thou hast heard  
The sentence of the god, and thy heart owns it ;

If thou wilt cast aside this cumbrous pomp,  
And in seclusion purify thy soul  
Long fever'd and sophisticate, the gods  
May give thee space for penitential thoughts :  
If not—as surely as thou standest here,  
Wilt thou lie stiff and weltering in thy blood.—  
The vision presses on me now.

ADRASTUS.

Art mad ?

Resign thy state ? Sue to the gods for life,  
The common life which every slave endures,  
And meanly clings to ? No ; within yon walls  
I shall resume the banquet, never more  
Broken by man's intrusion. Councillors,  
Farewell !—go mutter treason till ye perish !

*[Exeunt ADRASTUS, CRYTHES, and Soldiers.]*

ION, *who stands apart leaning on a pedestal.*

'Tis seal'd !

MEDON.

Let us withdraw, and strive  
By sacrifice to pacify the gods !  
MEDON, AGENOR, and Councillors retire : they leave  
CTESIPHON, PHOCION, and ION. ION still stands  
*apart, as wrapt in meditation.*

CTESIPHON.

'Tis well ; the measure of his guilt is fill'd.  
Where shall we meet at sunset ?

PHOCION.

In the grove

Which with its matted shade imbrovns the vale,  
 Between those buttresses of rock that guard  
 The sacred mountain on its western side,  
 Stands a rude altar—overgrown with moss,  
 And stain'd with drippings of a million showers,  
 So old, that no tradition names the power  
 That hallow'd it,—which we will consecrate  
 Anew to freedom and to justice.

CTESIPHON.

Thither

Will I bring friends to meet thee. Shall we speak  
 To yon rapt youth? [pointing to ION.]

PHOCION.

His nature is too gentle.  
 At sunset we will meet.—With arms?

CTESIPHON.

A knife—

One sacrificial knife will serve.

PHOCION.

At sunset!

[*Exeunt CTESIPHON and PHOCION severally.*]

ION comes forward.

ION.

O wretched man, thy words have seal'd thy doom!  
 Why should I shiver at it, when no way,  
 Save this, remains to break the ponderous cloud  
 That hangs above my wretched country?—death—  
 A single death, the common lot of all,  
 Which it will not be mine to look upon,—

And yet its ghastly shape dilates before me ;  
I cannot shut it out ; my thoughts grow rigid,  
And as that grim and prostrate figure haunts them,  
My sinews stiffen like it. Courage, Ion !  
No spectral form is here ; all outward things  
Wear their own old familiar looks ; no dye  
Pollutes them. Yet the air has scent of blood,  
And now it eddies with a hurtling sound,  
As if some weapon swiftly clove it. No—  
The falchion's course is silent as the grave  
That yawns before its victim. Gracious powers !  
If the great duty of my life be near,  
Grant it may be to suffer, not to strike ! [Exit.

END OF ACT II.

## A C T III.

## SCENE I.

*A terrace of the Temple.*

CLEMANTHE, ION.

CLEMANTHE.

NAY, I must chide this sorrow from thy brow,  
Or 'twill rebuke my happiness ;—I know  
Too well the miseries that hem us round ;  
And yet the inward sunshine of my soul,  
Unclouded by their melancholy shadows,  
Bathes in its deep tranquillity one image—  
One only image, which no outward storm  
Can ever ruffle. Let me wean thee, then,  
From this vain pondering o'er the general woe,  
Which makes my joy look ugly.

ION.

No, my fair one,

The gloom that wrongs thy love is unredeem'd  
By generous sense of others' woe : too sure  
It rises from dark presages within,  
And will not from me.

CLEMANTHE.

Then it is most groundless !

Hast thou not won the blessings of the perishing  
By constancy, the fame of which shall live  
While a heart beats in Argos ?—hast thou not  
Upon one agitated bosom pour'd  
The sweetest peace ? and can thy generous nature,  
While it thus sheds felicity around it,  
Remain itself unblest'd ?

ION.

I strove awhile

To think the assured possession of thy love  
With too divine a burthen weigh'd my heart  
And press'd my spirits down ;—but 'tis not so ;  
Nor will I with false tenderness beguile thee,  
By feigning that my sadness has a cause  
So exquisite. Clemanthe ! thou wilt find me  
A sad companion ;—I who knew not life,  
Save as the sportive breath of happiness,  
Now feel my minutes teeming, as they rise,  
With grave experiences ; I dream no more  
Of azure realms where restless beauty sports  
In myriad shapes fantastic ; dismal vaults  
In black succession open till the gloom  
Afar is broken by a streak of fire  
That shapes my name—the fearful wind that moans  
Before the storm articulates its sound ;  
And as I pass'd but now the solemn range  
Of Argive monarchs, that in sculptured mockery

Of present empire sit, their eyes of stone  
 Bent on me instinct with a frightful life  
 That drew me into fellowship with them,  
 As conscious marble; while their ponderous lips—  
 Fit organs of eternity—unclosed,  
 And, as I live to tell thee, murmur'd "Hail!  
 Hail! ION THE DEVOTED!"

CLEMANTHE. These are fancies,

Which thy soul, late expanded with great purpose,  
 Shapes, as it quivers to its natural circle  
 In which its joys should lurk, as in the bud  
 The cells of fragrance cluster. Bid them from thee  
 And strive to be thyself.

ION. I will do so!

I'll gaze upon thy loveliness, and drink  
 Its quiet in;—how beautiful thou art!—  
 My pulse throbs now as it was wont;—a being,  
 Which owns so fair a glass to mirror it,  
 Cannot show darkly.

CLEMANTHE. We shall soon be happy;

My father will rejoice to bless our love,  
 And Argos waken;—for her tyrant's course  
 Must have a speedy end.

ION.

It must! It must!

CLEMANTHE.

Yes ; for no empty talk of public wrongs  
Assails him now ; keen hatred and revenge  
Are roused to crush him.

ION.

Not by such base agents

May the august lustration be achieved :  
He who shall cleanse his country from the guilt  
For which Heaven smites her, should be pure of soul,  
Guileless as infancy, and undisturb'd  
By personal anger as thy father is,  
When, with unswerving hand and piteous eye,  
He stops the brief life of the innocent kid  
Bound with white fillets to the altar ;—so  
Enwreathed by fate the royal victim heaves,  
And soon his breast shall shrink beneath the knife  
Of the selected slayer !

CLEMANTHE.

'Tis thyself

Whom thy strange language pictures—Ion ! thou—

ION.

She has said it ! Her pure lips have spoken out  
What all things intimate ;—didst thou not mark  
*Me* for the office of avenger—*me* ?

CLEMANTHE.

No ;—save from the wild picture that thy fancy—  
Thy o'erwrought fancy drew ; I thought it look'd  
Too like thee, and I shudder'd.



ION.

So do I !

And yet I almost wish I shudder'd more,  
For the dire thought has grown familiar with me—  
Could I escape it !

CLEMANTHE.

'Twill away in sleep.

ION.

No, no ! I dare not sleep—for well I know  
That then the knife will gleam, the blood will gush,  
The form will stiffen !—I will walk awhile  
In the sweet evening light, and try to chase  
These fearful images away.

CLEMANTHE.

Let me

Go with thee. O, how often hand in hand  
In such a lovely light have we roam'd westward  
Aimless and blessed, when we were no more  
Than playmates :—surely we are not grown stranger  
Since yesterday !

ION.

No, dearest, not to-night :

The plague yet rages fiercely in the vale,  
And I am placed in grave commission here  
To watch the gates ;—indeed thou must not pass ;  
I will be merrier when we meet again,—  
Trust me, my love, I will ; farewell !

[Exit ION.]

CLEMANTHE.

Farewell then !

How fearful disproportion shows in one  
Whose life hath been all harmony ! He bends  
Towards that thick covert where in blessed hour  
My father found him, which has ever been  
His chosen place of musing. Shall I follow ?  
Am I already grown a selfish mistress,  
To watch his solitude with jealous eye,  
And claim him all ? That let me never be—  
Yet danger from within besets him now,  
Known to me only—I will follow him ! [ *Exit.*

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SCENE II.

*An opening in a deep wood—in front an old grey altar.*

*Enter ION.*

ION.

O winding pathways, o'er whose scanty blades  
Of unaspiring grass mine eyes have bent  
So often when by musing fancy sway'd,  
That craved alliance with no wider scene  
Than your fair thickets border'd, but was pleased  
To deem the toilsome years of manhood flown,  
And, on the pictured mellowness of age  
Idly reflective, image my return  
From careful wanderings, to find ye gleam  
With unchanged aspect on a heart unchanged,  
And melt the busy past to a sweet dream

As then the future was ;—why should ye now  
Echo my steps with melancholy sound  
As ye were conscious of a guilty presence ?  
The lovely light of eye, that, as it waned,  
Touch'd ye with softer, homelier look, now fades  
In dismal blackness ; and yon twisted roots  
Of ancient trees, with whose fantastic forms  
My thoughts grew humorous, look terrible,  
As if about to start to serpent life,  
And hiss around me ;—whither shall I turn ?—  
Where fly ?—I see the myrtle-cradled spot  
Where human love instructed by divine  
Found and embraced me first ; I'll cast me down  
Upon that earth as on a mother's breast,  
In hope to feel myself again a child.

[ION goes into the wood.]

*Enter CTESIPHON, CASSANDER, and other Argive youths.*

CTESIPHON.

Sure this must be the place that Phocion spoke of ;—  
The twilight deepens, yet he does not come.  
O, if instead of idle dreams of freedom,  
He knew the sharpness of a grief like mine,  
He would not linger thus !

CASSANDER.

The sun's broad disk  
Of misty red, a few brief minutes since,  
Sank 'neath the leaden wave ; but night steals on  
With rapid pace to veil us, and thy thoughts

Are eager as the favouring darkness.

*Enter PHOCION.*

CTESIPHON.

Welcome !

Thou know'st all here.

PHOCION.

Yes ; I rejoice, Cassander,  
To find thee my companion in a deed  
Worthy of all the dreamings of old days,  
When we, two rebel youths, grew safely brave  
In visionary perils. We 'll not shame  
Our young imaginations. Ctesiphon,  
We look to thee for guidance in our aim.

CTESIPHON.

I bring you glorious news. There is a soldier,  
Who, in his reckless boyhood, was my comrade,  
And though by taste of luxury subdued  
Even to brook the tyrant's service, burns  
With generous anger to avenge that grief  
I bear above all others. He has made  
The retribution sure. From him I learnt  
That when Adrastus reach'd his palace court,  
He paused, to struggle with some mighty throe  
Of passion ; then call'd eagerly for wine,  
And bade his soldiers share his choicest stores,  
And snatch, like him, a day from Fortune. Soon,  
As one worn out by watching and excess,  
He stagger'd to his couch, where now he lies

Oppress'd with heavy sleep, while his loose soldiers,  
Made by the fierce carousal vainly mad  
Or grossly dull, are scatter'd through the courts  
Unarm'd and cautionless. The eastern portal  
Is at this moment open ; by that gate  
We all may enter unperceived, and line  
The passages which gird the royal chamber,  
While one blest hand within completes the doom  
Which Heaven pronounces. Nothing now remains,  
But that as all would share this action's glory,  
We join in one great vow, and choose one arm  
Our common minister. Oh, if these sorrows  
Confer on me the office to return  
Upon the tyrant's shivering heart the blow  
Which crush'd my father's spirit, I will leave  
To him who cares for toys the patriot's laurel  
And the applause of ages !

PHOCION.

Let the gods

By the old course of lot reveal the name  
Of the predestined champion. For myself,  
Here do I solemnly devote all powers  
Of soul and body to that glorious purpose  
We live but to fulfil.

CTESIPHON.

And I !

CASSANDER.

And I !

ION.

*[Who has advanced from the wood, rushes to the altar,  
and exclaims]*

And I !

PHOCION.

Most welcome ! The serenest powers of justice,  
In prompting thy unspotted soul to join  
Our bloody councils, sanctify and bless them !

ION.

The gods have prompted me ; for they have given  
One dreadful voice to all things which should be  
Else dumb or musical ; and I rejoice  
To step from the grim round of waking dreams  
Into this fellowship which makes all clear.  
Wilt trust me, Ctesiphon ?

CTESIPHON.

Yes ; but we waste  
The precious minutes in vain talk : if lots  
Must guide us, have ye scrolls ?

PHOCION.

Cassander has them :  
The flickering light of yonder glade will serve him  
To inscribe them with our names. Be quick, Cassander !

CTESIPHON.-

I wear a casque, beneath whose iron circlet  
My father's dark hairs whiten'd ; let it hold  
The names of his avengers !  
*[Ctesiphon takes off his helmet and gives it to Cassander,  
who retires with it.]*

PHOCION [*to Ctesiphon.*]

He whose name  
Thou shalt draw first shall fill the post of glory.  
Were it not also well, the second name  
Should designate another charged to take  
The same great office, if the first should leave  
His work imperfect?

CTESIPHON.

There can scarce be need;  
Yet as thou wilt. May the first chance be mine;  
I will leave little for a second arm!

[*CASSANDER returns with the helmet.*]

CTESIPHON.

Now, gods, decide!

[*CTESIPHON draws a lot from the helmet.*]

PHOCION.

The name? Why dost thou pause?

CTESIPHON.

Tis Ion!

ION.

Well I knew it would be mine!

[*CTESIPHON draws another lot.*]

CTESIPHON.

Phocion! it will be thine to strike *him* dead  
If he should prove faint-hearted.

PHOCION.

With my life

I'll answer for his constancy.

CTESIPHON [to ION.]

Thy hand !

'Tis cold as death.

ION.

Yes ; but it is as firm.

What ceremony next ?

[CTESIPHON leads ION to the altar, and gives him a knife.]

CTESIPHON.

Receive this steel,

For ages dedicate in my sad home  
To sacrificial uses ; grasp it nobly,  
And consecrate it to untrembling service  
Against the king of Argos and his race.

ION.

His race ! Is he not left alone on earth ?  
He hath no brother, and no child.

CTESIPHON.

Such words

The god hath used who never speaks in vain.

PHOCION.

There were old rumours of an infant born  
And strangely vanishing ;—a tale of guilt  
Half-hush'd, perchance distorted in the hushing,  
And by the wise scarce heeded, for they deem'd it  
One of a thousand guilty histories,  
Which, if the walls of palaces could speak,  
Would show that, nursed by prideful luxury,  
To pamper which the virtuous peasant toils,  
Crimes grow unpunish'd which the pirates' nest,



Or want's foul hovel, or the cell which justice  
Keeps for unlicensed guilt, would startle at !  
We must root out the stock, that no stray scion  
Renew the tree, whose branches, stifling virtue,  
Shed poison-dews on joy.

[*ION approaches the altar, and, lifting up the knife, speaks.*]

Ye eldest gods,  
Who in no statues of exactest form  
Are palpable ; who shun the azure heights  
Of beautiful Olympus, and the sound  
Of ever-young Apollo's minstrelsy ;  
Yet, mindful of the empire which ye held  
Over dim Chaos, keep revengeful wrath  
On falling nations, and on kingly lines  
About to sink for ever ; ye, who shed  
Into the passions of earth's giant brood  
And their fierce usages the sense of justice ;  
Who clothe the fated battlements of tyranny  
With blackness as a funeral pall, and breathe  
Through the proud halls of time-embolden'd guilt  
Portents of ruin, hear me !—In your presence,  
For now I feel ye nigh, I dedicate  
This arm to the destruction of the king  
And of his race ! O keep me pitiless ;  
Expel all human weakness from my frame,  
That this keen weapon shake not when his heart  
Should feel its point ; and if he has a child  
Whose blood is needful to the sacrifice

My country asks, harden my soul to shed it!—  
Was not that thunder?

CTESIPHON.

No; I heard no sound.

Now mark me, Ion!—thou shalt straight be led  
To the king's chamber; we shall be at hand;  
Nothing can give thee pause. Hold! one should watch  
The city's eastern portal, lest the troops,  
Returning from the work of plunder home,  
Surround us unprepared. Be that thy duty.

[To PHOCION.

PHOCION:

I am to second Ion if he fail.

CTESIPHON.

He cannot fail;—I shall be nigh. What, Ion!

ION.

Who spake to me? Where am I? Friends, your pardon:  
I am prepared; yet grant me for a moment,  
One little moment, to be left alone.

CTESIPHON.

Be brief then, or the season of revenge  
Will pass. At yonder thicket we'll expect thee.

[*Exeunt all but ION.*

ION.

Methinks I breathe more freely, now my lot  
Is palpable, and mortals gird me round,  
Though my soul owns no sympathy with theirs.  
Some one approaches—I must hide this knife—  
Hide! I have ne'er till now had aught to hide

From any human eye. . . . [He conceals the knife in his vest.

[Enter CLEMANTHE.]

Clemanthe here !

CLEMANTHE,

Forgive me that I break upon thee thus :

I meant to watch thy steps unseen ; but night

Is thickening ; thou art haunted by sad fancies,

And 'tis more terrible to think upon thee

Wandering with such companions in thy bosom,

Than in the peril thou art wont to seek

Beside the bed of death.

ION.

Death, sayst thou ? Death ?

Is it not righteous when the gods decree it ?

And brief its sharpest agony ? Yet, fairest,

It is no theme for thee. Go in at once,

And think of it no more.

CLEMANTHE,

Not without thee.

Indeed thou art not well ; thy hands are marble ;

Thine eyes are fix'd ; let me support thee, love :—

Ha ! what is that gleaming within thy vest ?

A knife ! Tell me its purpose, Ion !

ION.

No ;

My oath forbids.

CLEMANTHE.

An oath ! O gentle Ion,

What can have link'd thee to a cause which needs  
A stronger cement than a good man's word?  
There's danger in it. Wilt thou keep it from me?

ION.

Alas, I must. Thou wilt know all full soon—

[Voices call ION!]

Hark! I am call'd.

CLEMANTHE.

Nay, do not leave me thus.

ION.

'Tis very sad [voices again]—I dare not stay—farewell!

[Exit.

CLEMANTHE.

It must be to Adrastus that he hastes!

If by his hand the fated tyrant die,

Austere remembrance of the deed will hang

Upon his delicate spirit like a cloud,

And tinge its world of happy images

With hues of horror. Shall I to the palace,

And, as the price of my disclosure, claim

His safety? No!—'Tis never woman's part

Out of her fond misgivings to perplex

The fortunes of the man to whom she cleaves;

'Tis hers to weave all that she has of fair

And bright in the dark meshes of their web

Inseparate from their windings. My poor heart

Hath found its refuge in a hero's love,

Whatever destiny his generous soul

Shape for him;—'tis its duty to be still,

And trust him till it bound or break with his. [Exit.

## SCENE III.

*A Chamber in the Temple.*

*Enter MEDON, followed by ABRA.*

MEDON.

My daughter not within the temple, sayst thou ?  
Abroad at such an hour ? Sure not alone  
She wander'd : tell me truly, did not Phocion  
Or Ion bear her company ? 'twas Ion—  
Confess ;—was it not he ? I shall not chide,  
Indeed I shall not.

ABRA.

She went forth alone ;  
But it is true that Ion just before  
Had taken the same path.

MEDON.

It was to meet him.  
I would they were return'd ; the night is grown  
Of an unusual blackness. Some one comes—  
Look if it be my daughter.

ABRA [*looking out.*]

No ; young Irus,  
The little slave, whose pretty tale of grief

Agenor, with so gracious a respect,  
This morning told us.

MEDON.

Let him come ; he bears  
Some message from his master.

*Enter IRUS.*

MEDON [*to IRUS.*]

Thou art pale :

Has any evil happen'd to Agenor?

IRUS.

No, my good lord ; I do not come from him ;  
I bear to thee a scroll from one who now  
Is number'd with the dead ; he was my kinsman,  
But I had never seen him till he lay  
Upon his death-bed ; for he left these shores  
Long before I was born, and no one knew  
His place of exile ;—on this mournful day  
He landed, was plague-stricken, and expired.  
My gentle master gave me leave to tend  
His else unsolaced death-bed ;—when he found  
The clammy chilness of the grave steal on,  
He call'd for parchment, and with trembling hand,  
That seem'd to gather firmness from its task,  
Wrote earnestly ; conjured me take the scroll  
Instant to thee ; and died.

[*IRUS gives a scroll to MEDON.*]

MEDON [*reading the scroll.*]

These are high tidings.

Abra ! is not Clemanthe come ? I long

To tell her all.

*Enter CLEMANTHE.*

MEDON.

Sit down, my pensive child.

Abra, this boy is faint ; see him refresh'd

With food and wine before thou lett'st him pass.

IRUS.

I have too long been absent from Agenor,

Who needs my slender help.

MEDON.

Nay, I will use

Thy master's firmness here, and use it so

As he would use it. Keep him prisoner, Abra,

Till he has done my bidding.

[*Exeunt ABRA and IRUS.*]

Now, Clemanthe,

Though thou hast play'd the truant and the rebel,

I will not be too strict in my award,

By keeping from thee news of one to thee

Most dear—nay, do not blush—I say most dear.

CLEMANTHE.

It is of Ion ;—no—I do not blush,

But tremble. O my father, what of Ion ?

MEDON.

How often have we guess'd his lineage noble !  
And now 'tis proved. The kinsman of that youth  
Was with another hired to murder him  
A babe ;—they tore him from his mother's breast,  
And to a sea-girt summit, where a rock  
O'erhung a chasm, by the surge's force  
Made terrible, rush'd with him. As the gods  
In mercy order'd it, the foremost ruffian,  
Who bore no burden, pressing through the gloom  
In the wild hurry of his guilty purpose,  
Trode at the extreme verge upon a crag  
Loosen'd by summer from its granite bed,  
And suddenly fell with it ;—with his fall  
Sank the base daring of the man who held  
The infant ; so he placed the unconscious babe  
Upon the spot where it was found by me ;  
Watch'd till he saw the infant safe ; then fled,  
Fearful of question ; and return'd to die.  
That child is Ion. Whom dost guess his sire ?—  
The first in Argos.

CLEMANTHE.

Dost thou mean Adrastus ?

He cannot—must not—be that tyrant's son !

MEDON.

It is most certain. Nay, my thankless girl,  
He hath no touch of his rash father's pride ;  
For Nature, from whose genial lap he smiled  
Upon us first, hath moulded for her own



The suppliant of her bounty ;—thou art bless'd ;  
Thus, let me bid thee joy.

CLEMANTHE.

Joy, sayst thou—joy !

Then I must speak—he seeks Adrastus' life ;  
And at this moment, while we talk, may stain  
His soul with parricide.

MEDON.

Impossible !

Ion, the gentlest——

CLEMANTHE.

It is true, my father ;

I saw the weapon gleaming in his vest ;  
I heard him call'd !

MEDON.

Shall I alarm the palace ?

CLEMANTHE.

No ; in the fierce confusion, he would fall  
Before our tale could be his safeguard. Gods !  
Is there no hope, no refuge ?

MEDON.

Yes, if Heaven

Assist us. I bethink me of a passage,  
Which, fashion'd by a king in pious zeal,  
That he might seek the altar of the god  
In secret, from the temple's inmost shrine  
Leads to the royal chamber. I have track'd it  
In youth for pastime. Could I thread it now,  
I yet might save him.

CLEMANTHÉ.

O, make haste, my father !

Shall I attend thee ?

MEDON.

No ; thou wouldst impede

My steps ;—thou art fainting ; when I have lodged thee safe

In thy own chamber, I will light the torch,

And instantly set forward.

CLEMANTHÉ.

Do not waste

An instant's space on me ; speed, speed, my father—

The fatal moments fly ; I need no aid ;—

Thou seest I am calm, quite calm.

MEDON.

The gods protect thee !

*[Exeunt severally.]*

END OF ACT III.

## A C T I V.

## SCENE I.

*The Royal Chamber. ADRASTUS on a couch, asleep.*

*Enter ION with the knife.*

ION.

Why do I creep thus stealthily along  
With trembling steps? Am I not arm'd by Heaven  
To execute its mandate on a king  
Whom it hath doom'd? And shall I falter now,  
While every moment that he breathes may crush  
Some life else happy?—Can I be deceived,  
By some foul passion, crouching in my soul,  
Which takes a radiant form to lure me on?  
Assure me, gods!—Yes; I have heard your voices;  
For I dare pray ye now to nerve my arm  
And see me strike! [He goes to the couch.]

He's smiling in his slumber,  
As if some happy thought of innocent days  
Play'd at his heart-strings: must I scare it thence  
With death's sharp agony? He lies condemn'd  
By the high judgment of supernal Powers,

And he shall know their sentence. Wake, Adrastus!  
Collect thy spirits, and be strong to die!

ADRASTUS.

Who dares disturb my rest? Guards! Soldiers!  
Recreants!

Where tarry ye? Why smite ye not to earth  
This bold intruder?—Ha! no weapon here!—  
What wouldst thou with me, ruffian? [Rising.

ION.

I am none,  
But a sad instrument in Jove's great hand  
To take thy life, long forfeited—Prepare!  
Thy hour is come!

ADRASTUS.

Villains! does no one hear?

ION.

Vex not the closing minutes of thy being  
With torturing hope or idle rage; thy guards,  
Palsied with revelry, are scatter'd senseless,  
While the most valiant of our Argive youths  
Hold every passage by which human aid  
Could reach thee. Present death is the award  
Of Powers who watch above me while I stand  
To execute their sentence.

ADRASTUS.

Thou!—I know thee—  
The youth I spared this morning, in whose ear  
I pour'd the secrets of my bosom. Kill me,  
If thou dar'st do it; but bethink thee first

How the grim memory of thy thankless deed  
Will haunt thee to the grave !

ION.

It is most true ;  
Thou spar'dst my life, and therefore do the gods  
Ordain me to this office, lest thy fall  
Seem the chance forfeit of some single sin,  
And not the great redress of Argos. Now—  
Now, while I parley—Spirits that have left,  
Within this hour, their plague-tormented flesh  
To rot untomb'd, glide by, and frown on me,  
Their slow avenger—and the chamber swarms  
With looks of Furies—Yet a moment wait,  
Ye dreadful prompters !—If there is a friend,  
Whom dying thou wouldst greet by word or token,  
Speak thy last bidding.

ADRASTUS.

I have none on earth.  
If thou hast courage, end me !

ION.

Not one friend !  
Most piteous doom !

ADRASTUS.

Art melted ?

ION.

If I am,  
Hope nothing from my weakness ; mortal arms,  
And eyes unseen that sleep not, gird us round,  
And we shall fall together. Be it so !

ADRASTUS.

No ; strike at once ; my hour is come ; in thee  
I recognise the minister of Jove,  
And, kneeling thus, submit me to his power.

[ADRASTUS *kneels.*]

ION.

Avert thy face !

ADRASTUS.

No ; let me meet thy gaze ;  
For breathing pity lights thy features up  
Into more awful likeness of a form  
Which once shone on me ;—and which now my sense  
Shapes palpable—in habit of the grave,  
Inviting me to the sad realm where shades  
Of innocents, whom passionate regard  
Link'd with the guilty, are content to pace  
With them the margin of the inky flood  
Mournful and calm ;—'tis surely there ;—she waves  
Her pallid hand in circle o'er thy head,  
As if to bless thee—and I bless thee too,  
Death's gracious angel !—Do not turn away.

ION.

Gods ! to what office have ye doom'd me !—Now !  
[ION *raises his arm to stab ADRASTUS, who is kneeling,*  
*and gazes steadfastly upon him. The voice of MEDON*  
*is heard without, calling ION ! ION !—ION drops his*  
*arm.*]

ADRASTUS.

Be quick, or thou art lost !

[As ION has again raised his arm to strike, MEDON rushes in behind him.]

MEDON.

Ion, forbear!

Behold thy son, Adrastus!

[ION stands for a moment stupified with horror, drops the knife, and falls senseless on the ground.]

ADRASTUS.

What strange words

Are these which call my senses from the death

They were composed to welcome? Son! 'tis false—

I had but one—and the deep wave rolls o'er him!

MEDON.

That wave received, instead of the fair nursing,

One of the slaves who bore him from thy sight

In wicked haste to slay;—I'll give thee proofs.

ADRASTUS.

Great Jove, I thank thee!—raise him gently—proofs!

Are there not here the lineaments of her

Who made me happy once—the voice, now still,

That bade the long-seal'd fount of love gush out,

While with a prince's constancy he came

To lay his noble life down; and the sure,

The dreadful proof, that he whose guileless brow

Is instinct with her spirit, stood above me,

Arm'd for the traitor's deed?—It is my child!

[ION, reviving, sinks on one knee before ADRASTUS.]

ION.

Father!

[Noise without.]

MEDON.

The clang of arms !

ION. [*starting up.*]

They come ! they come !

They who are leagued with me against thy life.

Here let us fall !

ADRASTUS.

I will confront them yet.

Within I have a weapon which has drank

A traitor's blood ere now ;—there will I wait them :

No power less strong than death shall part us now.

[*Exeunt ADRASTUS and ION as to an inner chamber.*]

MEDON.

Have mercy on him, gods, for the dear sake

Of your most single-hearted worshipper !

*Enter CTESIPHON, CASSANDER, and others.*

CTESIPHON.

What treachery is this—the tyrant fled,

And Ion fled too !—Comrades, stay this dotard,

While I search yonder chamber.

MEDON.

Spare him, friends,—

Spare him to clasp awhile his new-found son ;

Spare him as Ion's father !

CTESIPHON.

Father ! yes—

That is indeed a name to bid me spare ;—

Let me but find him, gods !

[*He rushes into the inner chamber.*]



MEDON [*to CASSANDER and the others.*]

Had ye but seen

What I have seen, ye would have mercy on him.

CRYTHES *enters with soldiers.*

Ha, soldiers! hasten to defend your master;

That way——

[*As CRYTHES is about to enter the inner chamber,*

CTESIPHON *rushes from it with a bloody dagger, and stops them.*]

CTESIPHON.

It is accomplished; the foul blot  
Is wiped away. Shade of my murder'd father,  
Look on thy son, and smile!

CRYTHES.

Whose blood is that?

It cannot be the king's!

CTESIPHON.

It cannot be!

Think'st thou, foul minion of a tyrant's will,  
He was to crush, and thou to crawl for ever?  
Look there, and tremble!

CRYTHES.

Wretch! thy life shall pay

The forfeit of this deed.

[*CRYTHES and soldiers seize CTESIPHON.*

*Enter ADRASTUS mortally wounded, supported by ION.*

ADRASTUS.

Here let me rest;—

In this old chamber did my life begin,

And here I'll end it: Crythes! thou hast timed  
Thy visit well, to bring thy soldiers hither  
To gaze upon my parting.

CRYTHES.

To avenge thee;—

Here is the traitor!

ADRASTUS.

Set him free at once:—

Why do ye not obey me? Ctesiphon,  
I gave thee cause for this;—believe me now  
That thy true steel has made thy vengeance sure;  
And as we now stand equal, I will sue  
For a small boon—let me not see thee more.

CTESIPHON.

Farewell!

[*Exit* CTESIPHON.]

ADRASTUS [*to* CRYTHES *and the soldiers.*]

Why do ye tarry here?

Begone!—still do ye hover round my couch?  
If the commandment of a dying king  
Is feeble, as a man who has embraced  
His child for the first time since infancy,  
And presently must part with him for ever,  
I do adjure ye leave us!

[*Exeunt all but* ION *and* ADRASTUS.]

ION.

O my father!

How is it with thee now?

ADRASTUS.

Well; very well;—

Avenging Fate hath spent its utmost force  
Against me ; and I gaze upon my son  
With the sweet certainty that nought can part us  
Till all is quiet here. How like a dream  
Seems the succession of my regal pomps  
Since I embraced thy helplessness ! To *me*  
The interval hath been a weary one :  
How hath it pass'd with thee ?

ION.

But that my heart  
Hath sometimes ached for the sweet sense of kindred,  
I had enjoy'd a round of happy years  
As cherish'd youth e'er knew.

ADRASTUS.

I bless the gods  
That they have strewn along thy humble path  
Delights unblamed ; and in this hour I seem  
Even as I had lived so ; and I feel  
That I shall live in thee, unless that curse—  
Oh, if it should survive me !

ION.

Think not of it ;  
The gods have shed such sweetness in this moment,  
That, howsoe'er they deal with me hereafter,  
I shall not deem them angry. Let me call  
For help to staunch thy wound ; thou art strong yet,  
And yet may live to bless me.

ADRASTUS.

Do not stir ;

My strength is ebbing fast ; yet, as it leaves me,  
The spirit of my stainless days of love  
Awakens ; and their images of joy,  
Which at thy voice started from blank oblivion,  
When thou wert strange to me, and then half-shown  
Look'd sadly through the mist of guilty years,  
Now glimmer on me in the lovely light  
Which at thy age they wore. Thou art all thy mother's,  
Her elements of gentlest virtue cast  
In mould heroical.

ION.

Thy speech grows fainter ;  
Can I do nothing for thee ?

ADRASTUS.

Yes ;—my son,  
Thou art the best, the bravest, of a race  
Of rightful monarchs ; thou must mount the throne  
Thy ancestors have fill'd, and by great deeds  
Efface the memory of thy fated sire,  
And win the blessing of the gods for men  
Stricken for him. Swear to me thou wilt do this,  
And I shall die forgiven.

ION.

I will.

ADRASTUS.

Rejoice,  
Sufferers of Argos ! I am growing weak,  
And my eyes dazzle ; let me rest my hands,  
Ere they have lost their feeling, on thy head.—

So! So!—thy hair is glossy to the touch  
As when I last enwreath'd its tiny curl  
About my finger; I did image then  
Thy reign excelling mine; it is fulfill'd,  
And I die happy. Bless thee, King of Argos! [Dies.

ION.

He 's dead! and I am fatherless again.—  
King did he hail me? shall I make that word  
A spell to bid old happiness awake  
Throughout the lovely land that father'd me  
In my forsaken childhood?

[He sees the knife on the ground, and takes it up.

Most vain dream!

This austere monitor hath bid thee vanish  
Ere half-reveal'd. Come back, thou truant steel;  
Half of thy work the gods absolved thee from—  
The rest remains! Lie there!

[He conceals the knife in his vest. Shouts heard without.

The voice of joy!

Is this thy funeral wailing? O my father!  
Mournful and brief will be the heritage  
Thou leavest me; yet I promised thee in death  
To grasp it;—and I will embrace it now.

*Enter AGENOR and others.*

AGENOR.

Does the king live?

ION.

Alas! in me. The son  
Of him whose princely spirit is at rest,

Claims his ancestral honours.

AGENOR.

That high thought

Anticipates the prayer of Argos, roused  
To sudden joy. The sages wait without  
To greet thee : wilt confer with them to-night,  
Or wait the morning ?

ION.

Now ;—the city's state  
Allows the past no sorrow. I attend them. [Exeunt.

---

SCENE II.

*Before the Gate of the City.*

PHOCION on guard.

PHOCION.

Fool that I was to take this idle office  
At most inglorious distance from the scene  
Which shall be freedom's birth-place ; to endure  
The phantasies of danger which the soul  
Uncheer'd by action coldly dallies with  
Till it begins to shiver ! Long ere this,  
If Ion's hand be firm, the deed is past,  
And yet no shout announces that the bonds  
Of tyranny are broken. [Shouts at a distance.  
Hark ! 'tis done !

*Enter CTESIPHON.*

All hail, my brother freeman!—art not so?—  
Thy looks are haggard—is the tyrant slain?  
Is liberty achieved?

CTESIPHON.

The king is dead;  
This arm—I bless the righteous Furies!—slew him.

PHOCION.

Did Ion quail, then?

CTESIPHON.

Ion!—clothe thy speech  
In phrase more courtly; he is king of Argos,  
Accepted as the tyrant's son, and reigns.

PHOCION.

It cannot be; I can believe him born  
Of such high lineage; yet he will not change  
His own rich treasury of unruffled thoughts  
For all the frigid glories that invest  
The loveless state in which the monarch dwells  
A terror and a slave. [Shouts again.]

CTESIPHON.

Dost hear that shout?

'Tis raised for him!—the craven-hearted world  
Is ever eager thus to hail a master,  
And patriots smite for it in vain. Our Soldiers,  
In the gay recklessness of men who sport  
With life as with a plaything; Citizens  
On wretched beds gaping for show; and Sages,  
Vain of a royal sophist, madly join

In humble prayer that he would deign to tread  
Upon their necks; and he is pleased to grant it.

PHOCION.

He shall not grant it! If my life, my sense,  
My heart's affections, and my tongue's free scope  
Wait the dominion of a mortal will,  
What is the sound to me, whether my soul  
Bears "Ion" or "Adrastus" burnt within it  
As my soul's owner? Ion tyrant? No!  
Grant me a moment's pleading with his heart,  
Which has not known a selfish throb till now,  
And thou shalt see him smile this greatness from him.

CTESIPHON.

Go teach the eagle when in azure heaven  
He upward darts to seize his madden'd prey,  
Shivering through the death-circle of its fear,  
To pause and let it 'scape, and thou mayst win  
Man to forego the sparkling round of power,  
When it floats airily within his grasp!

PHOCION.

Why thus severe? Our nature's common wrongs  
Affect thee not; and that which touch'd thee nearly  
Is well avenged.

CTESIPHON.

Not while the son of him  
Who smote my father reigns! I little guess'd  
Thou wouldst require a prompter to awake  
The memory of the oath so freshly sworn,  
Or of the place assign'd to thee by lot,



Should our first champion fail to crush the race—  
Mark me !—"the race" of him my arm has dealt with.  
Now is the time, the palace all confused,  
And the prince dizzy with strange turns of fortune,  
To do thy part.

PHOCION.

Have mercy on my weakness !

If thou hadst known this comrade of my sports,  
One of the same small household whom his mirth  
Unfailing gladden'd ;—if a thousand times  
Thou hadst, by strong prosperity made thoughtless,  
Touch'd its unfather'd nature in its nerve  
Of agony, and felt no chiding glance ;—  
Hadst thou beheld him overtax his strength  
To serve the wish his genial instinct guess'd,  
Till his dim smile the weariness betray'd,  
Which it would fain dissemble ; hadst thou known  
In sickness the sweet magic of his care,  
Thou couldst not ask it.—Hear me, Ctesiphon !—  
I had a deadly fever once, and slaves  
Fled me : he watch'd, and glided to my bed,  
And sooth'd my dull ear with discourse which grew  
By nice degrees to ravishment, till pain  
Seem'd an heroic sense, which made me kin  
To the great deeds he pictured, and the brood  
Of dizzy weakness flickering through the gloom  
Of my small curtain'd prison caught the hues  
Of beauty spangling out in glorious change ;  
And it became a luxury to lie

And faintly listen. Canst thou bid me slay him?

CTESIPHON.

The deed be mine. Thou 'lt not betray me?

[*Going.*

PHOCION.

Hold!

If by our dreadful compact he must fall,  
I will not smite him with my coward thought  
Winging a distant arm; I will confront him  
Arm'd with delicious memories of our youth,  
And pierce him through them all.

CTESIPHON.

Be speedy, then!

PHOCION.

Fear not that I shall prove a laggard, charged  
With weight of such a purpose.—Fate commands,  
And I live now but to perform her bidding.

[*Exeunt severally.*

---

### SCENE III.

*A Terrace in the Garden of the Palace, by Moonlight.*

*Enter ION and AGENOR.*

AGENOR.

Wilt thou not in to rest?

ION.

My rest is here—

Beneath the greatness of the heavens, which awes  
My spirit, toss'd by sudden change, and torn  
By various passions, to repose. Yet age  
Requires more genial nourishment—pray seek it—  
I will but stay thee to inquire once more  
If any symptom of returning health  
Bless the wan city ?

AGENOR.

No—the perishing  
Lift up their painful heads to bless thy name,  
And their eyes kindle as they utter it ;  
But still they perish.

ION.

So!—give instant order,  
The rites which shall confirm me in my throne  
Be solemnized to-morrow.

AGENOR.

How ! so soon,  
While the more sacred duties to the dead  
Remain unpaid ?

ION.

Let them abide my time—  
They will not tarry long. I see thee gaze  
With wonder on me—do my bidding now,  
And trust me till to-morrow. Pray go in,  
The night will chill thee else.

AGENOR.

Farewell, my lord ! [Exit.]

ION.

Now all is stillness in my breast—how soon  
To be displaced by more profound repose,  
In which no thread of consciousness shall live  
To feel how calm it is!—O lamp serene,  
Do I lift up to thee undazzled eyes  
For the last time? Shall I enjoy no more  
Thy golden haziness which seem'd akin  
To my young fortune's dim felicity?  
And when it coldly shall embrace the urn  
That shall contain my ashes, will no thought  
Of all the sweet ones cherish'd by thy beams  
Awake to tremble with them? Vain regret!  
The pathway of my duty lies in sunlight,  
And I would tread it with as firm a step,  
Though it should terminate in cold oblivion,  
As if Elysian pleasures at its close  
Gleam'd palpable to sight as things of earth.  
Who passes there?

[*Enter PHOCION behind, who strikes at ION with a dagger.*]

PHOCION.

This to the king of Argos!

[*ION struggles with him, seizes the dagger, which he throws away.*]

ION.

I will not fall by thee, poor wavering novice

In the assassin's trade!—thy arm is feeble—

[*He confronts PHOCION.*]

Phocion!—was this well aim'd? thou didst not mean—

PHOCION.

I meant to take thy life, urged by remembrance  
Of yesterday's great vow.

ION.

And couldst thou think

I had forgotten?

PHOCION.

Thou?

ION.

Couldst thou believe,

That one, whose nature had been arm'd to stop  
The life-blood's current in a fellow's veins,  
Would hesitate when gentler duty turn'd  
His steel to nearer use? To-morrow's dawn  
Shall see me wield the sceptre of my fathers:  
Come, watch beside my throne, and, if I fail  
In sternest duty which my country needs,  
My bosom will be open to thy steel,  
As now to thy embrace!

PHOCION.

Thus let me fall

Low at thy feet, and kneeling here receive  
Forgiveness; do not crush me with more love  
Than lies in the word "pardon."

ION.

And that word

I will not speak ;—what have I to forgive ?  
A devious fancy, and a muscle raised  
Obedient to its impulse ! Dost thou think  
The tracings of a thousand kindnesses,  
Which taught me all I guess'd of brotherhood,  
Are in the rashness of a moment lost ?

PHOCION.

I cannot look upon thee ; let me go,  
And lose myself in darkness.

ION.

Nay, old playmate,  
We part not thus—the duties of my state  
Will shortly end our fellowship ; but spend  
A few sweet minutes with me. Dost remember  
How in a night like this we climb'd yon walls—  
Two vagrant urchins, and with tremulous joy  
Skimm'd through these statue-border'd walks that gleam'd  
In bright succession ? Let us tread them now ;  
And think we are but older by a day,  
And that the pleasant walk of yesternight  
We are to-night retracing. Come, my friend !—  
What, drooping yet ! thou wert not wont to seem  
So stubborn—cheerily, my Phocion—come ! [*Excunt.*]

END OF ACT IV.

## A C T V.

## SCENE I.

TIME—THE MORNING OF THE SECOND DAY.

*The Terrace of the Palace.**Two Soldiers on guard.*

1 SOLDIER.

A stirring season, comrade ! our new prince  
Has leap'd as eagerly into his seat  
As he had languish'd an expectant heir  
Weary of nature's kindness to old age,  
He was esteem'd a modest stripling ;—strange  
That he should, with such reckless hurry, seize  
The gaudy shows of power !

2 SOLDIER.

'Tis honest nature ;  
The royal instinct was but smouldering in him,  
And now it blazes forth. I pray the gods  
He may not give us cause to mourn his sire.

1 SOLDIER.

No more ; he comes.

*Enter ION.*

ION.

Why do ye loiter here ?

Are all the statues decked with festal wreaths  
As I commanded ?

1 SOLDIER.

We have been on guard  
Here by Agenor's order since the nightfall.

ION.

On guard ! Well, hasten now and see it done ;  
I need no guards. *[Exeunt Soldiers.]*

The awful hour draws near ;  
I am composed to meet it.—Phocion comes :  
He will unman me ; yet he must not go,  
Thinking his presence painful.

*Enter PHOCION.*

Friend, good morrow !  
Thou play'st the courtier early.

PHOCION.

Canst thou speak  
In that old tone of common cheerfulness,  
That blithely promises delightful years,  
And hold thy mournful purpose ?

ION.

I have drawn  
From the selectest fountain of repose  
A blessed calm :—when I lay down to rest,



I fear'd lest bright remembrances of childhood  
Should with untimely visitation mock me;  
But deep and dreamless have my slumbers been.  
If sight of thee renews the thoughts of life  
Too busily,—I prize the love that wakes them.

PHOCION.

Oh, cherish them, and let them plead with thee  
To grant my prayer,—that thou wouldst live for Argos,  
Not die for her;—thy gracious life shall win  
More than thy death the favour of the gods,  
And charm the marble aspect of grim Fate  
Into a blessed change: I, who am vow'd,  
And who so late was arm'd Fate's minister,  
Implore thee!

ION.

Speak to me no more of life;  
There is a dearer name I would recall—  
Thou understand'st me—

*Enter* AGENOR.

AGENOR.

Thou hast forgot to name  
Who shall be bidden to this evening's feast.

ION.

The feast! most true; I had forgotten it.  
Bid whom thou wilt; but let there be large store,  
If our sad walls contain it, for the wretched  
Whom hunger palsies. It may be few else  
Will taste it with a relish. [Exit AGENOR.]

[ION resumes his address to PHOCION, and continues it,  
broken by the interruptions which follow.]

I would speak

A word of her who yester-morning rose  
To her light duties with as blithe a heart  
As ever yet its equal beating veil'd  
In moveless alabaster ;—plighted now,  
In liberal hour, to one whose destiny  
Shall freeze the sources of enjoyment in it,  
And make it heavy with the life-long pang  
A widow'd spirit bears !—

*Enter CLEON.*

CLEON.

The heralds wait  
To learn the hour at which the solemn games  
Shall be proclaim'd.

ION.

The games !—yes, I remember  
That sorrow's darkest pageantries give place  
To youth's robustest pastimes—Death and Life  
Embracing :—at the hour of noon.

CLEON.

The wrestlers  
Pray thee to crown the victor.

ION.

If I live,  
Their wish shall govern me. [Exit CLEON.  
Could I recall

One hour, and bid thy sister think of me  
With gentle sorrow, as a playmate lost,  
I should escape the guilt of having stopp'd  
The pulse of hope in the most innocent soul  
That ever passion ruffled. Do not talk  
Of me as I shall seem to thy kind thoughts,  
But harshly as thou canst ; and if thou steal  
From thy rich store of popular eloquence  
Some bitter charge against the faith of kings,  
'Twill be an honest treason.

*Enter CASSANDER.*

CASSANDER.

Pardon me,  
If I entreat thee to permit a few  
Of thy once-cherish'd friends to bid thee joy  
Of that which swells their pride.

ION.

They 'll madden me.—

Dost thou not see me circled round with care?  
Urge me no more.

[*As CASSANDER is going, ION leaves PHOCION, and comes to him.*]

Come back, Cassander ! see  
How greatness frets the temper. Keep this ring—  
It may remind thee of the pleasant hours  
That we have spent together, ere our fortunes  
Grew separate : and with thy gracious speech  
Excuse me to our friends. [Exit CASSANDER.]

PHOCION.

'Tis time we seek

The temple.

ION.

Phocion! must I to the temple?

PHOCION.

There sacrificial rites must be perform'd  
Before thou art enthroned.

ION.

Then I must gaze

On things which will arouse the struggling thoughts  
I had subdued—perchance may meet with her

Whose name I dare not utter. I am ready. [Exeunt.

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SCENE II.*The Temple.*

CLEMANTHE, ABRA.

ABRA.

Be comforted, dear lady ;—he must come  
To sacrifice.

CLEMANTHE.

Recall that churlish word,  
That stubborn "*must*," that bounds my living hopes,  
As with an iron circle. He *must* come!

How piteous is affection's state, that cleaves  
To such a wretched prop! I had flown to him  
Long before this, but that I fear'd my presence  
Might prove a burthen,—and he sends no word,  
No token that he thinks of me! Art sure  
That he *must* come? The hope has torture in it;  
Yet it is all my bankrupt heart hath left  
To feed upon.

ABRA.

I see him now with Phocion  
Pass through the inner court.

CLEMANTHE.

He will not come  
This way, then, to the place for sacrifice.  
I can endure no more: speed to him, Abra;  
And bid him, if he holds Clemanthe's life  
Worthy a minute's loss, to seek me here.

ABRA.

Dear lady!—

CLEMANTHE.

Do not answer me, but run,  
Or I shall give yon crowd of sycophants  
To gaze upon my sorrow.

[*Erit* ABRA.]

It is hard;  
Yet I must strive to bear it, and find solace  
In that high fortune which has made him strange.  
He bends this way—but slowly—mournfully.  
O, he is ill; how has my slander wronged him!

*Enter ION.*

ION.

What wouldst thou with me, lady?

CLEMANTHE.

Is it so?

Nothing, my lord, save to implore thy pardon,  
That the departing gleams of a bright dream,  
From which I scarce had waken'd, made me bold  
To crave a word with thee;—but all are fled—  
And I have nought to seek.

ION.

A goodly dream;

But thou art right to think it was no more,  
And study to forget it.

CLEMANTHE.

To forget it?

Indeed, my lord, I cannot wish to lose  
What, being past, is all my future hath,  
All I shall live for: do not grudge me this,  
The brief space I shall need it.

ION.

Speak not, fair one,

In tone so mournful, for it makes me feel  
Too sensibly the hapless wretch I am,  
That troubled the deep quiet of thy soul  
In that pure fountain which reflected heaven,  
For a brief taste of rapture.

CLEMANTHE.

Dost thou yet

Esteem it rapture, then ? My foolish heart,  
Be still ! Yet wherefore should a crown divide us ?  
O, my dear Ion !—let me call thee so  
This once at least—it could not in my thoughts  
Increase the distance that there was between us,  
When, rich in spirit, thou to strangers' eyes  
Seem'd a poor foundling.

ION.

It must separate us !

Think it no harmless bauble, but a curse  
Will freeze the current in the veins of youth,  
And from familiar touch of genial hand,  
From household pleasures, from sweet daily tasks,  
From airy thought, free wanderer of the heavens,  
For ever banish me !

CLEMANTHE.

Thou dost accuse

Thy state too hardly. It may give some room,  
Some little space, amidst its radiant folds,  
For love to make its nest in !

ION.

Not for me :

My pomp must be most lonesome, far removed  
From that sweet fellowship of human kind  
The slave rejoices in : my solemn robes  
Shall wrap me as a panoply of ice,  
And the attendants who may throng around me  
Shall want the flatteries which may basely warm  
The sceptral thing they circle. Dark and cold

Stretches the path, which, when I wear the crown,  
I needs must enter :—the great gods forbid  
That thou shouldst follow in it !

CLEMANTHE.

O unkind !

And shall we never see each other ?

ION [*after a pause.*]

Yes !

I have ask'd that dreadful question of the hills  
That look eternal ; of the flowing streams  
That lucid flow for ever ; of the stars,  
Amid whose fields of azure my raised spirit  
Hath trod in glory : all were dumb ; but now,  
While I thus gaze upon thy living face,  
I feel the love that kindles through its beauty  
Can never wholly perish ;—we *shall* meet  
Again, Clemanthe !

CLEMANTHE.

Bless thee for that name ;

Call me that name again ; thy words sound strangely,  
Yet they breathe kindness. Shall we meet indeed ?  
Think not I would intrude upon thy cares,  
Thy councils, or thy pomps ;—to sit at distance,  
To weave, with the nice labour which preserves  
The rebel pulses even, from gay threads  
Faint records of thy deeds, and sometimes catch  
The falling music of a gracious word,  
Or the stray sunshine of a smile, will be



Comfort enough :—do not deny me this ;  
Or if stern fate compel thee to deny,  
Kill me at once !

ION.

No ; thou must live, my fair one :  
There are a thousand joyous things in life,  
Which pass unheeded in a life of joy  
As thine hath been, till breezy sorrow comes  
To ruffle it ; and daily duties paid  
Hardly at first, at length will bring repose  
To the sad mind that studies to perform them.  
Thou dost not mark me.

CLEMANTHE.

Oh, I do ! I do !

ION.

If for thy brother's and thy father's sake  
Thou art content to live, the healer Time  
Will reconcile thee to the lovely things  
Of this delightful world,—and if another,  
A happier—no, I cannot bid thee love  
Another !—I did think I could have said it,  
But 'tis in vain.

CLEMANTHE.

Thou art mine own then still ?

ION.

I am thine own ! thus let me clasp thee ; nearer ;  
O joy too thrilling and too short !

*Enter AGENOR.*

AGENOR.

My Lord,

The sacrificial rites await thy presence.

ION.

I come.—One more embrace—the last, the last

In this world ! Now farewell !

[*Exit.*

CLEMANTHE.

The last embrace !

Then he has cast me off !—No, 'tis not so ;

Some mournful secret of his fate divides us :

I'll struggle to bear that, and snatch a comfort

From seeing him uplifted. I will look

Upon him in his throne ; Minerva's shrine

Will shelter me from vulgar gaze ; I'll hasten,

And feast my sad eyes with his greatness there !

[*Exit.*

---

### SCENE III.

*The Great Square of the City—on one side a throne of state prepared,—on the other an altar,—the statues decorated with garlands.*

*Enter CTESIPHON and CASSANDER.*

CTESIPHON.

Vex me no more, by telling me, Cassander,

Of his fair speech : I prize it at its worth :

Thou 'lt see how he will act when seated firm

Upon the throne the craven tyrant fill'd,  
Whose blood he boasts, unless some honest arm  
Should shed it first.

CASSANDER.

Hast thou forgot the time  
When thou thyself wert eager to foretell  
His manhood's glory from his childish virtues ?  
Let me not think thee one of those fond prophets,  
Who are well pleased still to foretell success,  
So it remain their dream.

CTESIPHON.

Thou dost forget  
What has chill'd fancy and delight within me—

[*Music at a distance.*]

Hark !—servile trumpets speak his coming—watch,  
How power will change him. [They stand aside.]

*The Procession. Enter MEDON, AGENOR, PHOCION,  
TIMOCLES, CLEON, Sages and People; ION last, in  
royal robes. He advances amidst shouts, and speaks.*

ION.

I thank you for your greeting—Shout no more,  
But in deep silence raise your hearts to Heaven,  
That it may strengthen one so young and frail  
As I am, for the business of this hour.  
Must I sit here ?

MEDON.

Permit thy earliest friend,

Who has so often propp'd thy tottering steps,  
To lead thee to thy throne,—and thus fulfil  
His fondest vision.

ION.

Thou art still most kind—

MEDON.

Nay, do not think of me—my son ! my son !  
What ails thee ? When thou shouldst reflect the joy  
Of Argos, the strange paleness of the grave  
Marbles thy face.

ION.

Am I indeed so pale ?

It is a solemn office I assume ;  
Yet thus, with Phœbus' blessing, I embrace it.

*[Sits on the throne.]*

Stand forth, Agenor !

AGENOR.

I await thy will.

ION.

To thee I look as to the wisest friend  
Of this afflicted people :—thou must leave  
Awhile the quiet which thy life hath earn'd,  
To rule our councils ; fill the seats of justice  
With good men not so absolute in goodness,  
As to forget what human frailty is ;  
And order my sad country.

AGENOR.

Pardon me—

H

ION.

Nay, I will promise 'tis my last request ;  
Thou never couldst deny me what I sought  
In boyish wantonness, and shalt not grudge  
Thy wisdom to me, till our state revive  
From its long anguish ;—it will not be long  
If Heaven approve me here. Thou hast all power  
Whether I live or die.

AGENOR.

Die ! I am old—

ION.

Death is not jealous of thy mild decay,  
Which gently wins thee his : exulting Youth  
Provokes the ghastly monarch's sudden stride,  
And makes his horrid fingers quick to clasp  
His shivering prey at noontide. Let me see  
The captain of the guard.

CRYTHES.

I kneel to crave  
Humbly the favour which thy sire bestow'd  
On one who loved him well.

ION.

I cannot thank thee,  
That wakest the memory of my father's weakness ;  
But I will not forget that thou hast shared  
The light enjoyments of a noble spirit,  
And learn'd the need of luxury. I grant  
For thee and thy brave comrades, ample share  
Of such rich treasure as my stores contain,

To grace thy passage to some distant land,  
Where, if an honest cause engage thy sword,  
May glorious laurels wreath it ! In our realm  
We shall not need it longer.

CRYTHES.

Dost intend

To banish the firm troops before whose valour  
Barbarian millions shrink appall'd, and leave  
Our city naked to the first assault  
Of reckless foes ?

ION.

No, Crythes !—in ourselves,

In our own honest hearts and chainless hands  
Will be our safeguard :—while we seek no use  
Of arms, we would not have our children blend  
With their first innocent wishes ; while the love  
Of Argos and of justice shall be one  
To their young reason ; while their sinews grow  
Firm midst the gladness of heroic sports ;  
We shall not ask to guard our country's peace  
One selfish passion, or one venal sword.  
I would not grieve thee ;—but thy valiant troop—  
For I esteem them valiant—must no more  
With luxury which suits a desperate camp  
Infect us. See that they embark, Agenor,  
Ere night.

CRYTHES.

My lord—

ION.

No more—my word hath pass'd.

Medon, there is no office I can add  
To those thou hast grown old in ; thou wilt guard  
The shrine of Phœbus, and within thy home—  
Thy too delightful home—befriend the stranger  
As thou didst me ;—there sometimes waste a thought  
On thy spoil'd inmate !

MEDON.

Think of thee, my lord ?

Long shall we triumph in thy glorious reign—

ION.

Prithee no more. Argives ! I have a boon  
To crave of you ;—whene'er I shall rejoin  
In death the father from whose heart in life  
Stern fate divided me, think gently of him !  
For ye who saw him in his full-blown pride,  
Knew little of affections crush'd within,  
And wrongs which frenzied him ; yet never more  
Let the great interests of the state depend  
Upon the thousand chances that may sway  
A piece of human frailty ! Swear to me  
That ye will seek hereafter in yourselves  
The means of sovereign rule :—our narrow space,  
So happy in its confines, so compact,  
Needs not the magic of a single name  
Which wider regions may require to draw  
Their interests into one ; but, circled thus,  
Like a bless'd family by simple laws,

May tenderly be govern'd ; all degrees  
Moulded together as a single form  
Of nymph-like loveliness, which finest chords  
Of sympathy pervading shall suffuse  
In times of quiet with one bloom, and fill  
With one resistless impulse, if the hosts  
Of foreign power should threaten. Swear to me  
That ye will do this !

MEDON.

Wherefore ask this now ?  
Thou shalt live long ;—the paleness of thy face  
Which late appall'd me is grown radiant now,  
And thine eyes kindle with the prophecy  
Of lustrous years.

ION.

The gods approve me then !  
Yet I will use the function of a king,  
And claim obedience. Promise, if I leave  
No issue, that the sovereign power shall live  
In the affections of the general heart,  
And in the wisdom of the best.

MEDON *and others.*

We swear it !

ION.

Hear and record the oath, immortal powers !  
Now give me leave a moment to approach  
That altar unattended. [*He goes to the altar.*

Gracious gods !

In whose mild service my glad youth was spent,



Look on me now ;—and if there is a Power,  
As at this solemn time I feel there is,  
Beyond ye, that hath breathed through all your shapes  
The spirit of the beautiful that lives  
In earth and heaven ;—to ye I offer up  
This conscious being, full of life and love  
For my dear country's welfare. Let this blow  
End all her sorrows !

[*Stabs himself, and falls. CTESIPHON rushes to support him.*]

Ctesiphon, thou art  
Avenged, and wilt forgive me.

CTESIPHON.

Thou hast pluck'd  
The poor disguise of hatred from my soul,  
And made me feel how shallow is the wish  
Of vengeance. Could I die to save thee !

CLEMANTHE *rushes forward.*

CLEMANTHE.

Hold !

Let me support him—stand away—indeed  
I have best right, although ye know it not,  
To cling to him in death.

ION.

This is a joy  
I did not hope for—this is sweet indeed.—  
Bend thine eyes on me !

CLEMANTHE.

And for this it was

Thou wouldst have wean'd me from thee? Couldst thou  
think

I would be so divorced?

ION.

Thou art right, Clemanthe,—

It was a shallow and an idle thought;  
'Tis past; no show of coldness frets us now;  
No vain disguise, my love. Yet thou wilt think  
On that which, when I feign'd, I truly said—  
Wilt thou not, sweet one?

CLEMANTHE.

I will treasure all.

*Enter IRUS.*

IRUS.

I bring you glorious tidings—Ha! no joy  
Can enter here.

ION.

Yes—is it as I hope?

IRUS.

The pestilence abates.

ION. [*springs on his feet.*]

Do ye not hear?

Why shout ye not?—ye are strong—think not of me;  
Hearken! the curse my ancestry has spread  
O'er Argos is dispell'd—Agenor, give  
This gentle youth his freedom, who hath brought  
Sweet tidings that I shall not die in vain—

And Medon! cherish him as thou hast one  
Who dying blesses thee ;—my own Clemanthe!  
Let this console thee also—Argos lives—  
The offering is accepted—all is well!

[Dies.]

*The curtain falls.*

THE END.

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